

B E L S H A' Z Z A R :

A DRAMATIC POEM.

BY THE REV. H. H. MILMAN,
PROFESSOR OF POETRY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD.

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INTRODUCTION.

THOUGH, in the following Poem, I have adhered strictly to the outline in Scripture, I have availed myself of whatever appeared to my purpose in the profane historians. My general authorities, where I do not follow the Book of Daniel, are Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus ; but, perhaps, the best English account of Babylon is to be found in Prideaux's Connection of the Old and New Testament.

The publication of the Martyr of Antioch was considerably delayed by unforeseen circumstances. I take the liberty of mentioning this for two reasons. In the first place, because a coincidence in several circumstances between

that Poem and the Novel of Valerius, has led to a charge of plagiarism ; when, in fact, the Poem was written, and had been seen by some of my friends, before the publication of the prose work. Secondly, I am unwilling that my Poems should appear to follow each other with a haste and rapidity inconsistent with that deference for public opinion, which the manner of their reception would rather increase than diminish.

May I presume to hope that this, as well as the preceding works of the same nature, may tend to the advancement of those interests, in subservience to which alone our time and talents can be worthily employed—those of piety and religion ?

BELSHAZZAR.

CHARACTERS.

The DESTROYING ANGEL.

BELSHAZZAR.

ARIOCH, Captain of the Guard.

SABARIS, Chief Eunuch.

KALASSAN, High Priest of Bel.

DANIEL,
IMLAH, } *Jews.*
ADONIJAH,

NITOCRIS, Mother of Belshazzar.

NAOMI.

BENINA.

Babylonian Nobles—Priests—Diviners—Astrologers, &c

Scene—Babylon.



BELSHAZZAR.

The City of Babylon—Morning.

THE DESTROYING ANGEL.

WITHIN the cloud-pavilion of my rest,
Amid the Thrones and Princedoms, that await
Their hour of ministration to the Lord,
I heard the summons, and I stood with wings
Outspread for flight, before the Eternal Throne.
And, from the unapproached depth of light
Wherein the Almighty Father of the worlds
Dwells, from seraphic sight by glory veil'd,
Came forth the soundless mandate, which I felt
Within, and sprung upon my obedient plumes.
But as I sail'd my long and trackless voyage

Down the deep bosom of unbounded space,
The manifest bearer of Almighty wrath,
I saw the Angel of each separate star
Folding his wings in terror, o'er his orb
Of golden fire ; and shuddering till I pass'd
To pour elsewhere Jehovah's cup of vengeance.

And now I stand upon this world of man,
My wonted resting place.—But thou, oh Earth !
Thou only dost endure my fatal presence
Undaunted. As of old, I hover o'er
This haughty city of Chaldean Bel,
That not the less pours forth her festal pomp
To do unholy worship to her Gods,
That are not Gods, but works of mortal hands.

Behold ! the Sun hath burst the Eastern gates,
And all his splendour floods the tower'd walls,
Upon whose wide immeasurable circuit
The harnessed chariots crowd in long array.
Down every stately line of pillar'd street,
To each of the hundred brazen gates, young men

And flower-crown'd maidens, lead the mazy dance.
Here the vast Palace, whence yon airy gardens
Spread round, and to the morning airs hang forth
Their golden fruits and dewy opening flowers ;
While still the low mists creep, in lazy folds,
O'er the house-tops beneath. In every court,
Through every portal, throng, in servile haste,
Captains and Nobles. There, before the Temple,
On the far side of wide Euphrates' stream,
The Priests of Bel their impious rites prepare :
And cymbal clang, and glittering dulcimer,
With shrill melodious salutation, hail
The welcome morn, awakening all the City
To the last dawn that e'er shall gladden her.

Babylon ! Babylon ! that wak'st in pride
And glory, but shalt sleep in shapeless ruin,
Thus, with my broad and overshadowing wings,
I do embrace thee for mine own ; forbidding,
Even at this instant, yon bright orient Sun,
To shed his splendours on thy lofty streets.

Oh, Desolation's sacred place, as now
Thou 'rt darken'd, shall the darkness of the dead
Enwrap thee in its everlasting shade !

Babylon ! Babylon ! upon the wreck
Of that most impious tower your Fathers rear'd
To scale the crystal battlements of Heaven,
I set my foot, here take my gloomy rest
Even till that hour be come, that comes full soon.

Before the Temple.

KALASSAN—The PRIESTS.

FIRST PRIEST.

Didst thou behold it ?

SECOND PRIEST.

What ?

FIRST PRIEST.

'Tis gone, 'tis past—

And yet but now 'twas there, a cloudy darkness,

That, swallowing up the rays of the orient Sun,
Cast back a terrible night o'er all the City.

THIRD PRIEST.

Who stands aghast at this triumphant hour?
I tell thee that our Dreamers have beholden
Majestic visions. The besieging Mede
Was cast, with all his chariots, steeds, and men,
Into Euphrates' bosom.

KALASSAN.

Do ye marvel
But now that it was dark? yon orient Sun,
The Lord of Light, withdrew his dawning beams,
Till he could see the glory of the world,
Belshazzar, in his gilded galley riding
Across Euphrates.

FIRST PRIEST.

Give command that all
The brazen gates along the river side,
Stand open to receive the suppliant train.

SECOND PRIEST.

Hark ! with the trumpet sound their strong recoil
Upon their grating hinges harshly mingles.

THIRD PRIEST.

Lo ! how the bridge is groaning with the gifts
Of the great King. The camels bow their heads
Beneath the bright and odorous load they bear ;
The proud steeds toss their flower-enwoven manes,
And the cars rattle with their ponderous sound ;
While, silent, the slow elephants pursue
Their wondering way, and bear their crowded towers,
Widely reflected on the argent stream.

FOURTH PRIEST.

How proudly do the waters toss and foam
Before the barges, that with gilded prows
Set the pale spray on fire ! The rowers, clad
In Egypt's finest tunics, as they strike
The waters with their palmy oars, awake
Sweet music, as it seems, from all the tide ;

So exquisitely to the dashing strokes
Are the sweet lutes and floating hautboys timed.

FIRST PRIEST.

Yon bark, in which, at times, the silken curtains
Are by the courteous breezes fann'd aside,
Is that in which the Mother of the mightiest,
Nitocris, sits. Her presence seems to awe
At once, and give a pride to those who row
Her queenly state——

KALASSAN.

Behind—'tis he !—'tis he !—
Belshazzar's self—the waters crowd around,
—As though ambitious to reflect their Sovereign ;
And all the throng'd and living shores, that now
To the far limits of the City, pass'd
His name in one long shout, have paused to hear
Our loftier homage.——Are the Seventy here ?

FIRST PRIEST.

All.

KALASSAN.

Lift we, then, the solemn strain, in praise

Of the great King, and all the suppliant court
Will answer us in praise of mightiest Bel.

SONG OF THE PRIESTS.

Where are the thousand-throned kings,
Beneath whose empires' spacious wings,
The wide earth lay in mute repose?
He rose—Chaldea's King arose!
And bow'd was every crowned head,
And every marshall'd army fled;
Before his footstool bow'd they down,
The all-conquering Lord of Babylon!

SONG OF THE SUPPLIANTS.

Where are the thousand-shrined Gods,
Within whose temples' proud abodes
The nations crowded to invoke?
He woke, Chaldea's God awoke!
And mute was every sumptuous feast,
And rite, and song, and victim ceased;
And every Fane was overthrown,
Before the God of Babylon!

PRIESTS.

Ammon's crested pride lay low,
And broke was Elam's horned bow;
Damascus heard the ponderous fall
Of old Benhadad's palace wall;
The ocean redden'd with the fire
From the rock-built strengths of Tyre.
False was fierce Philistia's trust,
Desert Moab mourns in dust.
Lo! in chains our Captains bring
Haughty Zion's eyeless King.
Kedar's tents are struck, her bands
Scatter'd o'er her burning sands,
And Egypt's Pharaoh quails before
The Assyrian Lion's conquering roar.

THE SUPPLIANTS.

From his high Philistine fane,
Sea-born Dagon fled amain;
Moloch, he whose valley stood
Deep with infant's blameless blood:

Chemos, struck with pale affright,
Left his foul unfinish'd rite.
Her waning moon Astarte veil'd,
When the Tyrian's sea-wall fail'd.
In vain Damascus' children meet
At lofty Rimmon's molten feet.
And vain were Judah's prayers to him,
Between the golden Cherubim ;
In vain the Arab, in his flight,
Call'd on the glittering stars of night ;
And vain Osiris' timbrels blew
Over Egypt's maddening crew.

KALASSAN.

Lord of the world, and of the eternal city,
That wear'st Chaldea's regal diadem
Wreath'd with Assyria's, wherefore art thou here
Before the Temple of all-powerful Bel ?

BELSHAZZAR.

Chief of the Seventy chosen Priests, that serve
Within the Temple of our God, thou know'st

That the rebellious Mede, confederate
With Ashkenaz and Elam, and the might
Of Persia, hath begirt with insolent siege
Our city walls, and I would know what swift
And terrible vengeance is ordain'd on high
For the revolted from Chaldea's sway?

KALASSAN.

Live thou, oh King, for ever ! We are holding
This day our solemn rite. Our Priests and Seers
Each at his office stands throughout the Temple ;
And all our eight ascending towers that rise,
Each above each, in heavenward range, are throng'd
With those that strike the cymbal, and with voice
And mystic music summon down the Gods
To give us answer.

BELSHAZZAR.

Priests of Bel, and thou
High mitred Chief, Kalassan ! Lo, I bring
Gifts worthy of the Gods and of Belshazzar :
All that the world in its vast homage casts

Before our royal feet ; the gold that flows
In the red waters of the farthest East ;
The fragrant balm that weeps from glittering trees ;
The ivory, and the thin and snowy robes
Of Egypt ; and the purple merchandize
Of Sidon ; and the skins of beasts that far
In the dark forests fly the sight of man,
Yet not so far but that Assyria's servants
Track them, and rend away their bloody tribute ;
And slaves of every hue, and every age,
From all the kingdoms of our rule.

KALASSAN.

Great King,
What answer wouldst thou, which such sumptuous
offerings
May not compel !

BELSHAZZAR.

Declare ye to our Gods,
Thus saith Belshazzar : wherefore am I call'd
The King of Babylon, the scepter'd heir

Of ⁽¹⁾ Nabonassar's sway, if still my sight
Must be infested by rebellious arms,
That hem my city round; and frantic cries
Of onset, and the braying din of battle
Disturb my sweet and wonted festal songs?

NITOCRIS.

In the Gods' name, and in mine own, I answer!
When Nabonassar's heir shall take the sword
Of Nabonassar in his valiant hand;
With the inborn awe of majesty appal
Into the dust Rebellion's crested front:
When for the gliding bark on the smooth waters,
Whose motion doth but lull his silken couch,
He mounts the rushing chariot, and in arms
Asserts himself the lord of human kind.

SABARIS.

Will he endure it?

NITOCRIS.

Oh, my son! my son!
Must I repent me of that thrill of joy

I felt, when round my couch the slaves proclaim'd
I had brought forth a man into the world,
A child for empire born, the cradled Lord
Of Nations—oh, my son!—and all the pride
With which I saw thy fair and open brow
Expand in beauteous haughtiness, commanding
Ere thou could'st speak? And with thy growth, thy
greatness

Still ripen'd : like the palm amid the grove
Thou stood'st, the loftiest, at once, and comeliest
Of all the sons of men. And must I now
Wish all my pangs upon a shapeless offspring,
Or on a soft and dainty maiden wasted,
That might have been, if not herself, like her
Thy martial ancestress, Semiramis,
Mightiest—at least the Mother of the Mighty?

BELSHAZZAR.

Queen of Assyria, Nabonassar's daughter !
Wife of my royal father, Merodach !
Greater than all, from whom myself was born !

The Gods that made thee mother of Belshazzar,
Have arm'd thee with a dangerous licence. Thou,
Secure, may'st utter what from meaner lips
Had call'd upon the head the indignant sword
Of Justice. But to thee we deign reply.
Is 't not the charge of the great Gods t' uphold
The splendour of the world that doth them homage?
As soon would they permit the all-glorious Sun
To wither from their palace vault in heaven,
As this rich empire from the earth.

NITOCRIS.

And therefore

Be as the Gods, Belshazzar, and stand forth
To sweep away the desolating foe !
As when the thunders scatter all abroad
The lowering clouds at midnight, all the stars
Look glittering through the bright pellucid sky,
And in the glorious calm themselves have strew'd,
Repose triumphant the great Gods.

BELSHAZZAR.

Oh, queen !

The mother of Chaldea's royal lord
Ne'er ask'd in vain. Myself this day will mount
The car of battle, and along the walls
Display my terrors, for Assyria's hosts
To kindle into valour at my presence ;
And the pale rebels from their distant camp,
Like hunters that have roused the sleeping lion,
Snatch up their toils, and fly——

NITOCRIS.

Along the walls !

And not along the dusty battle plain ?
Yet 'tis enough—the fire but sleeps within thee.
And as the warhorse that hath sported long
On the green meads, beholds the flash of arms
Bright on the fountain where he bathes, and hears
The martial trumpet sounding, start erect
His kindling ears, his agitated mane

Trembles ; already on his back he feels
The gorgeous trappings and the armed rider,
And treads the sward as though he trampled down
Whole hosts before him ; thus Belshazzar's soul,
At sight of Babylon's exulting foes,
Shall waken to the warrior's noble wrath.

BELSHAZZAR.

Give instant order !

NITOCRIS.

Oh, tiara'd Mede !

And thou fierce Persian that dost boast thyself
As hardy as thy native mountains ! Thou,
The shepherd's nursling, Cyrus ! feel ye not
A prescient terror of your coming conqueror ?
The towers with which ye have girt your spacious camp,
Do they not rock even to their deep foundations,
In conscious awe ? But thou, my noble son !
Thy mother's heart, that beat but in thy presence,
Even when thou laid'st in soft inglorious dalliance,
When home thou com'st, high plumed with victory, hosts

In chains around thee, and the routed armies
Crowding to gaze upon their conqueror,
As though it were a solace in their fall
That great Belshazzar stoop'd to overthrow them ;
When all the myriads of vast Babylon
Shout in the triumph of their kingly lord ;
'That heart, my son, with such excess of pride
Will swell, that it will burst. Even now it fills
My woman's eyes with tears : when I should wear
A brow all rapture, I can only weep.

KALASSAN.

Lord of the Nations ! with our richest rites
Do we propitiate the eternal Gods.
Upon the golden altar, never wet
Save with the immaculate blood of yearling lambs⁽²⁾
We sacrifice—and on our topmost tower,
Where, on his couch, amid his native clouds,
The God reposes, must the chosen Virgin,⁽³⁾
Whom to our wandering search he first presents,
Await the bright descending Deity.

BELSHAZZAR.

What then !—the Gods hold festival to-night !
And shall the courts of great Chaldea's palace
Be silent of the festal song ? At eve
Our banquet shall begin ; and dusky night,
Astonish'd at our splendour, think his reign
Usurp'd as by a brighter day. Kalassan !
Whence are those golden vessels richly carved,
And bossy with enchased fruits and flowers ;
Goblets, and lavers, and tall chandeliers,
That, like to blossoming almond trees, branch out
In knots of glittering silver ?—meet were they
To minister at great Belshazzar's feast.

KALASSAN.

King of the Universe ! those vessels stood
Erst in the Temple of the Hebrew's God ;
But when Chaldea's arms laid waste the City,
And from their Temple, with destroying fire,
Scar'd the unresisting Deity, the spoils
Were seiz'd, and consecrate to mightier Bel.

BELSHAZZAR.

Let them be borne to grace our feast !

KALASSAN.

Most honour'd

Were they by such a noble profanation !

Give ye the order——

Ha ! what frantic shriek

Peals through the courts ?

PRIEST.

The slaves that girt themselves

To bear those vessels, on a sudden, all,

As though by viewless light'nings struck to earth,

Lie groveling on the pavement, and they clench

Their vacant hands in horror.

KALASSAN.

Raise them up,

And lash them to their duty.

SECOND PRIEST.

King of Earth !

The armed statue of thy ancestor,

Great Nabonassar, on its firm-set pedestal
Shakes, and its marble panoply resounds
Like distant thunder !

KALASSAN.

How ! the pavement rocks
Beneath our feet, like a tempestuous sea !

BELSHAZZAR.

What ! are Belshazzar's mandates thus delay'd
For the pale fears of slaves, and idle'sounds
That shake the earth, but not his kingly soul ?
Away with them ! we will not brook remonstrance
From vanquish'd men or Gods !—Away ! I say—

CHORUS.

Sovereign of all the streams that flow
From hills of everlasting snow,
Through vast Chaldea's fertile reign,
Down to the red and pearly⁽⁴⁾ main ;
And ere thy giant course is done,
Through all imperial Babylon ;

By stately towers and palace fair,
And blooming gardens hung in air ;
By every glowing brazen gate,
Rollest thy full exulting state.
Proud River ! 'strew thy waves to rest,
And smooth to peace thy azure breast,
While slowly o'er thy willing tide,
Belshazzar's gilded galleys ride.
Hear, King of Floods ! Euphrates, hear !
And pay the homage of thy fear.

CHORUS OF SUPPLIANTS.

Sovereign of all the lamps that shine
In yon empyreal arch divine,
That roll'st through half the fiery day,
O'er realms that own Chaldea's sway ;
O'er thrones whose monarchs wear her yoke,
And cities by her conquests broke ;
Thou Sun, whose morning splendours dwell
Upon the Temple towers of Bel,

The quiver of thy noontide rays
Exhaust in all their fiery blaze,
Upon the cloud-aspiring throne
Where rests the God of Babylon !
So shall the God in glory come
Down to his sumptuous earthly home.
Hear ! Monarch of the Planets ! hear—
And pause upon thy fleet career.

The Quarter of the Jewish Slaves.

IMLAH, NAOMI, BENINA.

BENINA.

Father ! dear Father ! said'st thou that our feet
Shall tread the glittering paths of Sion's hill ;
And that our lips shall breathe the fragrant airs
That blow from dewy Hermon, and the fount
Of Siloe flow in liquid music by us ?

IMLAH.

Oh, daughter of captivity, and born
To eat the bitter bread of servitude,
Benina, child of sadness !—yet the dearer
Because thou art the joy of desolate hearts
That have no joy but thee !—what knowest thou
Of that fair city, where our Fathers dwelt
While unforsaken by their God ?

BENINA.

My father !

Have I not seen my mother and thyself
Sit by the river side, and dwell for ever
On Salem's glories, and the Temple's pride,
Till tears have choked your sad though pleasant speech ?
In the deep midnight, when our lords are sleeping,
I've seen the Brethren from the willows take
Their wind-caressed harps, their half-breath'd sounds
Scarce louder than the rippling rivers dash
Around the matted sedge ; and still they pour'd
Their voices down the stream, as though they wish'd

Their songs to pass away to other lands
Beyond the bounds of their captivity.
I've listen'd in an ecstasy of tears,
Till purer waters seem'd to wander near me,
And sweeter flowers to bloom beneath my feet,
And towers of fairer structure to arise
Under the moonlight ; and I felt the joy
Of freedom in my light and sportive limbs.

IMLAH.

My sweetest child, and thou that gav'st to me
This dearest treasure, Naomi, thyself,
Even as thou wert in virgin loveliness
My plighted bride, renewed to tenderest youth !
I will not say I hope not (though my fears
And conscience of our ill desert reprove me)
That God even now prepares the promised hour,
When Israel shall shake off Assyria's chains,
And build long-wasted Sion's lovely walls.
The sands of the appointed years are run ;
The signs break out, as in the cloudy night

The stars ; and buried Prophets' voices seem
As from their graves to cry aloud, and mark
The hour that labours with our Israel's glory ;
And, more than all, but yesterday I saw
The holy Daniel——

NAOMI.

Daniel ! what of him,

Dear Imlah ?

IMLAH.

Till but lately he was girt
With sackcloth, with the meagre hue of fasting
On his sunk cheek, and ashes on his head ;
When, lo ! at once he shook from his gray locks
The attire of woe, and call'd for wine ; and since
He hath gone stately through the wondering streets
With a sad scorn. Amid the heaven-piercing towers,
Through cool luxurious courts, and in the shade
Of summer trees that play o'er crystal fountains,
He walks, as though he trod o'er moss-grown ruins,
'Mid the deep desolation of a city

Already by the almighty wrath laid waste.
And sometimes doth he gaze upon the clouds,
As though he recognized the viewless forms
Of arm'd destroyers in the silent skies.
And it is said, that at the dead of night
He hath pour'd forth thy burden, Babylon,
And loud proclaim'd the bowing down of Bel,
The spoiling of the spoiler. Even our lords,
As conscious of God's glory gathering round him,
Look on him with a silent awe, nor dare
To check his motion, or reprove his speech.

NAOMI.

Oh, Imlah ! shall our buried bones repose
In our own land ?

BENINA.

Speak on, my dearest :
Thy words are like the breezes of the west,
That breathe of Canaan's honey-flowing lar

IMLAH.

My child ! my child ! thy nuptials shall no
With song suppress'd, and dim half curtail

Stol'n from the observance of our jealous lords,
As mine and thy fond mother's were.—Who's here?

BENINA.

'Tis Adonijah: he hath heard thee name him,
And he will see the burning on my cheek,
And so detect our cause of fond discourse.

IMLAH.

I named him not——

BENINA.

Nay, father, now thou mock'st me.

IMLAH.

Alas! poor deer, thou'rt deeply stricken! Well—
It is a noble boy, that dares to fear
His God, nor makes his youth a privilege
For licence, and intemperate scorn of rule.

The above, ADONIJAH.

IMLAH.

Whence com'st thou, Adonijah, with thy brow
Elate, and full of pride, that scarce beseems
A captive?

ADONIJAH.

Imlah ! from the dawn of day
 I have been gazing from the walls, and saw
 The Persian reining in his fiery squadrons.
 Like ostriches they swept the sandy plain,
 As though they would outstrip the tardy winds ;
 And paus'd and wheel'd, and through the clouds of dust
 That rose around them, as round terrible Angels,
 Their scimitars in silver radiance flash'd.
 Oh, will it ever be, that once again
 The Lord of Hosts will lift the Lion banner
 Of Judah, and her sons go forth to war
 Like Joshua, or like him whose beardless strength
 O'erthrew the giant Philistine !

BENINA.

Ah, me !

And would'st thou, Adonijāh, seek the war,
 The ruthless, murtherous, and destroying war ?

ADONIJAH.

Why, yes ! nor would Benina love me less

For bringing home the spoil of God's proud foes,
To hang within his vindicated Temple.

BENINA.

So thou didst bring thyself unharm'd, unchanged,
Benina were content.

ADONIJAH.

Heaven's blessings on thee !

IMLAH.

Hear me, young Adonijah; thou dost love
My child: Benina, shall I say, or leave it
To thine own lips or eloquent eyes to tell,
How well thou lov'st the noble Adonijah ?
But, youth, I seek not to delay thy joy
With the cold envious prudence of old age,
That never felt the boiling blood of youth ;
For if I did, there's one would chide me here
For my forgetfulness of hours like these.
But yet I would not have my daughter wed
With the sad dowry of a master's stripes ;
I would not, Adonijah, on the eve

Of our deliverance, that the wanton Gentile
Should pass his jest on our cold entertainment,
And all the cheerless joy when captives wed,
To breed a race, whose sole inheritance
Shall be their parents' tasks and heavy bondage
Our father Jacob served seven tardy years
For beauteous Rachel, but I tax not thee
With such a weary service.

ADONIJAH.

Be they ages,
So the life beat within this bounding heart,
The love shall never fail !

IMLAH.

Here's one would trust thee,
Youth, should my cautious age be slow. Come hither,
'Thou tender vine, that need'st a noble stem :
Thou not repin'st because I wed thee not
To this fair elm, until the gentle airs
Of our own land, and those delicious dews
That weep like angels' tears of love, o'er all
The hill of Sion, gladden your sweet union,

And make you bear your clustering fruits in joy.
So now, enough, thou dost accept the terms,
And in the name of Him that rules on high,
I thus betroth the noble Adonijah
To soft Benina.—

Now, to him that hears
The captive's prayer. How long—oh, Lord!—how
long
Shall strangers trample down thy beauteous Sion?
How long shall Judah's hymns arise to thee
On foreign winds, and sad Jerusalem
On all her hills be desolate and mute?

God of the Thunder! from whose cloudy seat
The fiery winds of Desolation flow:
Father of Vengeance! that with purple feet,
Like a full wine-press, tread'st the world below.
The embattled armies wait thy sign to slay,
Nor springs the beast of havoc on his prey,
Nor withering Famine walks his blasted way,
Till thou the guilty land hast seal'd for woe.

God of the Rainbow ! at whose gracious sign
The billows of the proud their rage suppress :
Father of Mercies ! at one word of thine
An Eden blooms in the waste wilderness !
And fountains sparkle in the arid sands,
And timbrels ring in maidens' glancing hands,
And marble cities crown the laughing lands,
And pillar'd temples rise thy name to bless.

•

O'er Judah's land thy thunders broke—oh, Lord !
The chariots rattled o'er her sunken gate,
Her sons were wasted by the Assyrian sword,
Even her foes wept to see her fallen state ;
And heaps her ivory palaces became,
Her Princes wore the captive's garb of shame,
Her Temple sank amid the smouldering flame,
For thou didst ride the tempest cloud of fate.

O'er Judah's land thy rainbow, Lord, shall beam,
And the sad City lift her crownless head ;

And songs shall wake, and dancing footsteps gleam,
Where broods o'er fallen streets the silence of the dead.
The sun shall shine on Salem's gilded towers,
On Carmel's side our maidens cull the flowers,
To deck, at blushing eve, their bridal bowers,
And angel feet the glittering Sion tread.

Thy vengeance gave us to the stranger's hand,
And Abraham's children were led forth for slaves ;
With fetter'd steps we left our pleasant land,
Envyng our fathers in their peaceful graves.
The stranger's bread with bitter tears we steep,
And when our weary eyes should sink to sleep,
'Neath the mute midnight we steal forth to weep,
Where the pale willows shade Euphrates' waves.

The born in sorrow shall bring forth in joy ;
Thy mercy, Lord, shall lead thy children home ;
He that went forth a tender yearling boy,
Yet, ere he die, to Salem's streets shall come.

And Canaan's vines for us their fruits shall bear,
And Hermon's bees their honied stores prepare ;
And we shall kneel again in thankful prayer,
Where, o'er the cherub-seated God, full blaz'd th'
irradiate dome.

The Walls of Babylon.

BELSHAZZAR in his Chariot, NITOCRIS, ARIOCH, SABARIS, &c.

BELSHAZZAR.

For twice three hours our stately cars have roll'd
Along the broad highway that crowns the walls
Of mine imperial City, nor complete
Our circuit by a long and ample space.
And still our eyes look down on gilded roofs,
And towers and temples, and the spreading tops
Of cedar groves, through which the fountains gleam ;
And every where the countless multitudes,
Like summer insects in the noontide sun,
Come forth to bask in our irradiate presence.

Oh, thou vast Babylon ! what mighty hand
Created thee, and spread thee o'er the plain
Capacious as a world ; and girt thee round
With high tower'd walls, and bound thy gates with brass ;
And taught the indignant river to endure
Thy bridge of cedar and of palm, high hung
Upon its marble piers ?—What voice proclaim'd,
Amid the silence of the sands, “ Arise !
And be earth's wonder ? ” Was it not my fathers ?
Yea, mine entombed ancestors awake,
Their heads uplift upon their marble pillows ;
They claim the glory of thy birth. Thou hunter,
That didst disdain the quarry of the field,
Choosing thee out a nobler game of man,
Nimrod ! and thou that with unfeminine hand
Didst lash the coursers of thy battle-car
O'er prostrate thrones, and necks of captive kings,
Semiramis ! and thou whose kingly breath
Was like the desert wind, before its coming
The people of all earth fell down, and hid

Their humble faces in the dust ! that mad'st
The pastime of a summer day t' o'erthrow
A city, or cast down some ancient throne ;
Whose voice each ocean shore obey'd, and all
From sable Ethiopia to the sands
Of the gold-flowing Indian streams ;—oh ! thou
Lord of the hundred thrones, high Nabonassar !
And thou my father, Merodach ! ye crown'd
This City with her diadem of towers—
Wherefore ?—but prescient of Belshazzar's birth,
And conscious of your destin'd son, ye toil'd
To rear a meet abode. Oh, Babylon !
Thou hast him now, for whom through ages rose
Thy sky-exalted towers—for whom yon palace
Rear'd its bright domes, and groves of golden spires ;
In whom, secure of immortality
Thou stand'st, and consecrate from time and ruin,
Because thou hast been the dwelling of Belshazzar !

NITOCRIS.

I hear thy words : like thine, thy mother's heart

Swells, oh, my son ! to see thy seat of empire.
But will the Lord of Babylon endure,
What in yon plain beneath offends our sight,
The rebel Persian ?

BELSHAZZAR.

Gave we not command,
To Tartan and to Artamas, to sweep
Yon tribes away, or ere our car approach'd
The northern wall ?

ARIOCH.

They hasted forth, oh, King !
But Tartan came not back, nor Artamas.

BELSHAZZAR.

Slaves ! did they dare fall off from their allegiance ?

ARIOCH.

To the dominion they fell off of him
That hath the empire o'er departed souls.

NITOCRIS.

Look down ! look down ! where, proud of his light
conquest,

The Persian rides—it is the youthful Cyrus ;
How skilfully he winds through all the ranks
His steed, in graceful ease, as though he sate
Upon a firm-set throne, yet every motion
Obedient to his slack and gentle rein,
As though one will controll'd the steed and rider ;
Now leaps he down, and holds a brief discourse
With yon helm'd captain ; like a stooping falcon,
Now vaults he to the patient courser's back.
Happy the mother of that noble youth !

BELSHAZZAR.

Now, by great Bel ! thou dost abuse our patience.
Is that the rebel king to whom Belshazzar
Should veil his pride, and stoop to be his foe ;
Him with the brazen arms, that, dimly bright,
Scarce boast distinction from the meaner host ?
Where are his golden attributes of power,
The glorious ensigns of his sovereignty ;
The jewel'd diadem, the ivory sceptre,
The satrap circled throne, the kneeling hosts ?——

NITOCRIS.

Dost ask, my son, his marks of sovereignty ?
The armies that behold his sign, and trust
Their fate upon the wisdom of his rule,
Confident of accustom'd victory ;
The unconquerable valour, the proud love
Of danger, and the scorn of silken ease ;
The partnership in suffering and in want,
Even with his meanest follower ; the disdain
Of wealth, that wins the spoil but to bestow it,
Content with the renown of conquering deeds.

BELSHAZZAR.

By all our Gods!——

SABARIS.

Great Queen ! it ill beseems

The lowest of Chaldea's slaves to oppose
The mother of our king with insolent speech ;
But my bold zeal for him that rules the world
Has made me dauntless. Is it not heaven's will,
Written in the eternal course of human things,

Some kings are born to toil, and some to enjoy ;
Some to build up the palace domes of power,
That in their glowing shade their sons may sit
Transcendent in luxurious ease, as they
In conquest ? 'Tis the privilege of the chosen,
The mark'd of fate, and favourites of the Gods,
To find submissive earth deck'd out, a fair
And summer garden house, for one long age
Of toilless pleasure, and luxurious revel.

BELSHAZZAR.

The slave speaks well : and thee, oh, queen Nitocris !
This eve will we compel, with gracious violence,
To own our loftier fate. This sacred eve
We'll have an army wide as yon that spreads
Its tents on the hot sands ; and they shall feast
Around me, all reclin'd on ivory couches,
Strew'd with Sidonian purple, and soft webs
Of Egypt ; fann'd by bright and glittering plumes
Held in the snowy hands of virgin slaves ;
And o'er their turban'd heads shall lightly wave
The silken canopies, that softly tremble

To gales of liquid odour : all the courts
Shall breathe like groves of cassia and of nard.
And every paradise of golden fruits,
The forests and the tributary streams,
In this one banquet shall exhaust their stores
Of delicates ; the swans and Phasian birds,
And roes and deer from off a thousand hills,
Serv'd in the spices of the farthest East.
And we will feast to dulcimers and lutes,
And harps and cymbals, and all instruments
Of rapturous sound, till it shall seem the stars
Have stoop'd the nearer to our earth, to crown
Our banquet with their heavenly concert. There,
Our captains and our counsellors, our wives
And bright-ey'd concubines, through all the palace
Th' array of splendour shall prolong—while I,
In state supreme, and glory that shall shame
The setting sun amid his purple clouds,
Will on my massy couch of gold recline :
Then shalt thou come, and seeing thy son the orb
And centre of this radiance, even thyself

Shalt wonder at thy impious speech, that dared
To equal aught on earth to great Belshazzar.
And now, lead on!—

The above, BENINA, IMLAH, ADONIJAH, PRIESTS.

BENINA.

Ah, save me! save me!

ARIOCH.

Peace!

Before the king!—

BELSHAZZAR.

What frantic maid is this,
That shrieks and flies, with loose and rending garments,
And streaming hair?—And who are these that circle her,
And sing around her?

SABARIS.

Live, oh king, for ever!

Chaldea's priests, that seek this evening's bride
For mightiest Bel.

PRIESTS.

Beauteous damsel ! chosen to meet
First our wandering heaven-led feet.
Spotless virgin ! thee alone
The great God of Babylon,
From his starry seat above,
Hath beheld with looks of love.
Bride of him that rules the sky !
Cast not down thy weeping eye.
Daughter of the captive race !
For thine high and blissful place,
In the heaven-hung chamber laid,
Many a Babylonian maid
To the voiceless midnight air,
Murmurs low her bashful prayer.
With enamour'd homage see,
Round and round we circle thee ;
Round and round each dancing foot
Glitters to the breathing lute.

SABARIS.

Why dost thou struggle thus, fond slave?

BENINA.

My father!—

My dearest Adonijah! speak to him—

The panting breath swells in my throat, my words

Can find no utterance, save to thee.

IMLAH.

Great king!

They rend away my child, mine only child!—

BELSHAZZAR.

Peace! she is borne to serve the God of Babylon:

And ye should fall, and kiss their garment hems,

And bless them for the glory that awaits

The captive maiden——

ADONIJAH.

Glory! call ye it,

To be the lustful prey——

BENINA.

Sweet youth! no more.

Oh, speak not !—by the love thou bearest me—
By all our hopes—alas ! what hopes have we ?—
Let me endure no sufferings but my own.

BELSHAZZAR.

Priests, to your office !—

BENINA.

Oh ! no mercy—none—
Not even in thee, that wear'st a woman's form,
But all the cold relentless pride of man—
Mightiest of queens !—would I might add most gracious—

IMLAH.

God of our fathers ! that alone canst save,
Look down upon this guileless innocent.
Lo ! pale and fainting, like a wounded fawn
She hangs upon their arms—death scarce could throw
A sadder paleness, or more icy torpor,
Over that form, whose loveliness is now
Its bane, and stamps it for the worst of misery.

ADONIJAH.

Oh, for a Median scimitar !

ARIOCH.

What said he ?

BENINA.

Nought—nought—

ARIOCH.

The slave forgets that scourges hang
Upon our walls—

IMLAH.

And we had fondly thought
The bitter dregs of our captivity
Drank out ! Farewel, my child ! thou dost not hear me—
Thou liest in cold and enviable senselessness,
And we might almost fear, or hope, that death—
Compassionate death—had freed thee from their violence.
What now, my child ?

ADONIJAH.

Oh, beautiful Benina !

Why do thy timorous dove-like eyes awake,
And glow with scorn ? why dost thou shake away
The swoon of bashful fear, and stand erect,

Thou, that didst hang, but now, like a loose woodbine,
Trailing its beauteous clusters in the dust?

BENINA.

Give place, and let me speak unto my father,
And to this youth.—

Fierce men! your care is vain—
I will not stoop to fly.

IMLAH.

My soul is lost
In wonder; yet I touch thee once again,
And that is rapture.

BENINA.

Did ye not behold him
Upon the terrace top?—the Man of God!
The anointed Prophet!

IMLAH.

Daniel!

BENINA.

He whose lips
Burn with the fire from heaven! I saw him, father:

Alone he stood, and in his proud compassion
Look'd down upon this pomp that blaz'd beneath him,
As one that sees a stately funeral.

IMLAH.

He spoke not?—

BENINA.

No:—like words articulate,
His looks address'd my soul, and said—oh, maid,
Be of good cheer—and, like a robe of light,
A rapture fell upon me, and I caught
Contagious scorn of earthly power; and fear
And bashful shame are gone, and in the might
Of God, of Abraham's God, our father's God,
I stand, superior to the insulting heathen.

BELSHAZZAR.

What! wait ye still to lead the Gods their slave,
And thus delay Belshazzar's course?

BENINA.

Your Gods!

Whom I disdain to honour with my dread.

BELSHAZZAR.

Off with her ! and advance our royal car :—

Set forward.—

[*BELSHAZZAR departs with his train.*

BENINA.

Ye shall need no force to drag me.

My father !—Adonijah !—gaze not thus,
Blaspheming, with your timorous doubts, the arm
Of the Most High, that waves above mine head
In silent might unseen !——

And thou—go on,
Go on thy stately course—Imperial Lord
Of golden Babylon ! the scourge that lash'd
The Nations, from whose mantling cup of pride
Earth drank, and with the fierce intoxication
Scoff'd at the enduring heavens.

Go on, in awe
And splendour, radiant as the morning star,
But as the morning star to be cast down
Into the deep of deeps. Long, long the Lord

Hath bade his Prophets cry to all the world,
That Babylon shall cease ! Their words of fire
Flash round my soul, and lighten up the depths
Of dim futurity ! I hear the voice
Of the expecting grave !—I hear abroad
The exultation of unfetter'd earth !—
From East to West they lift their trampled necks,
Th' indignant nations : earth breaks out in scorn ;
The valleys dance and sing ; the mountains shake
Their cedar-crowned tops ! The strangers crowd
To gaze upon the howling wilderness,
Where stood the Queen of Nations. Lo ! even now,
Lazy Euphrates rolls his sullen waves
Through wastes, and but reflects his own thick reeds.
I hear the bitterns shriek, the dragons cry ;
I see the shadow of the midnight owl
Gliding where now are laughter-echoing palaces !
O'er the vast plain I see the mighty tombs
Of kings, in sad and broken whiteness gleam
Beneath the o'ergrown cypress—but no tomb

Bears record, Babylon, of thy last lord;
Even monuments are silent of Belshazzar !

PRIEST.

Still must we hear it ?—

BENINA.

Yea, ye must !—the words
Of God will find a voice in every wind ;
The stones will speak, the marble walls cry out !

PRIEST.

Maid, in Bel's appointed bride
We must brook the words of pride ;
Mortal voice may ne'er reprove
Whom the bright immortals love ;
Nor hand of mortal violate
Her, the chosen immortal's mate.

BENINA.

Oh, Adonijah ! soothe my mother's tears ;
Be to my father what I should have been ;

And now farewell ! Forget not her whose thoughts,
In terror and in rapture, still will dwell
On thee : in prayer, at morn and eve, forget not
Her who will need prayers worthier than her own.

Before the House of Imlah.

IMLAH, ADONIJAH. •
•

IMLAH.

We are here at length :—we two have glided on
Like voiceless ghosts, along the crowded streets.
The miserable pour their tale of anguish
Into the happy ear, and feel sweet solace
From his compassion ; but the wretched find
No comfort from imparting mutual bitterness.
I know I ought to feel that God protects
My child—I can but think that heathen arms
Have torn her from my bleeding heart ! I know

I ought to kindle with the heavenly fire
Of her rapt spirit, to dauntlessness like hers.
I can but tremble for her tender loveliness,
That us'd to cling to me for its support,
Like a soft lily, for the world's rude airs
Too frail.

ADONIJAH.

Scarce dare I speak, lest I speak rashly.
I have rebuked and struggled with my sorrow,
Till I detected in my secret heart
A proud reproach, that I was born a son
Of Abraham, to be trampled in the dust
Like a base worm, that dare not turn to sting
The insulting foot.

IMLAH.

Oh cool decline of day,
That wert the captive's hour of joy, his tasks
Fulfill'd, his master's wayward pride worn out,
How wert thou wont to lead my weary foot
To such a blissful home,—I've oft forgot

It was a captive's. Naomi, my wife,
I never fear'd to meet thy loving looks
Till now.

The above, NAOMI.

NAOMI.

So, Imlah, thou'rt return'd :—and thou,
My son, I'll call thee.—Sweet it is t' anticipate,
And make the fond tongue thus familiar
With words that it so oft must use. Stay, stay,
Beloved ! and I'll call forth, or ere ye enter,
My child, whose welcome will be sweeter to you
Than the cold babbling of her aged mother :—
I had forgot—she went abroad with you.

IMLAH.

Have mercy, Heaven !

NAOMI.

Now, whither is she gone ?
To seek for thee the cup of sparkling water
With which she used to lave thy burning brow ;

Or gather thee the rosy fruit, that gain'd
Fresh sweetness to thy taste, from that dear hand
That offer'd it. She ever thought—though weary
Herself and wanting food—of ministering
First to the ease and joy of those she lov'd.—
Ha! tears upon thy brow, thy noble brow,
Which I have seen endure——

IMLAH.

Go in!—no, stay
Without! I cannot venture where some mark
Of her fond duty and officious care,
Will be the first thing mine eyes see.—My wife,
Why dost thou tear thine hair, and clasp thy brain?
I have not told thee——

NAOMI.

What hast thou to tell me?
Thou'rt here without her:—thou and this brave youth
Have eyes that burst with tears. She's lost!—she's dead!

IMLAH.

Would that she were!

NAOMI.

Unnatural father ! wretch,
That hast no touch of human pity in thee,
To tell a mother thou canst wish her child
Where her fond arms can never fold her more !—
Oh, Imlah ! Imlah ! tell me—tell me all—
Ye cannot tell me more than what I fear.

IMLAH.

They tore her from us, for a paramour
For their false Gods——

NAOMI.

'Tis ever thus :—most bless'd
But to be made most wretched !

IMLAH.

Pardon her,
Oh Lord ! oh, we can chide on others' lips,
What our own burn to utter !

NAOMI.

All my care,
My jealous, vigilant, and restless care,

To veil her from the eyes of man, to keep her
Like a sweet violet, that the airs of heaven
Scarcely detect in its secluded shade,
All waste and vain ! I was so proud, to think
I had conceal'd our treasure from the knowledge
Of our rude masters—and I thought how envied
I should return among our barren mothers,
To Salem.

IMLAH.

Dearest ! she beheld—she felt
The arm of Israel's God protecting her.
Thou canst not think with what a beauteous scorn
Our soft and timorous child o'erawed the spoiler—
How nobly she reproved our fears.

NAOMI.

Poor fool !

To be deluded by those tender arts
She ever used—her only arts—to spare
Our bleeding hearts from knowing when she suffer'd.
What ! she look'd fearless, did she ? She in the arms

Of sinful men, that trembled at heaven's airs,
When they came breathing o'er her blushing cheek.
And ye—thou, Adonijah, that dost know
Her timorous nature, wert deceiv'd?—cold comfort!
Have ye no better?

IMLAH.

Oh, weep! weep, my wife!
Look not upon me with those stony eyes!
Oh, think—the cup is bitter, but the Lord
May change it;—think of him that lost so many,
His sons and daughters, at their jocund feast,
All at one blow—and said—* God gave, and God
Hath taken away.

NAOMI.

Had he but one, like ours;
One that engross'd his undivided love;
One such as ne'er before blest human heart,
Would he have said so?

* Job i. 21.

Wilt not tell me, too,
How Sarah in her old age bore a child,
To be a joy within her desolate house.
Go on—go on—recount each act of love,
Each merciful miracle, that we may know
How gracious God hath been to all—but us.

IMLAH.

Hear her not, God of Israel!—oh, my son!
We must distract this phrensy, or 'twill blight
Heaven's hop'd for blessings to a barren curse,
And intercept some soft descending mercy.
What shall we do?—what say?—to dissipate
Her brooding thoughts? We'll take the harps that hang
Around us, and are us'd to feel the hand
Of sorrow trembling on their mournful strings.
When ye demand sweet Sion's songs to mock them,
Proud strangers, our right hands forget their cunning.
But ye revenge you, wringing from our hearts
Sounds that might melt your senseless stones to pity.

HYMN.

Oh, thou that wilt not break the bruised reed,
Nor heap fresh ashes on the mourner's brow,
Nor rend anew the wounds that inly bleed,
The only balm of our afflictions thou,
Teach us to bear thy chastening wrath, oh God !
To kiss with quivering lips—still humbly kiss thy rod !

We bless thee, Lord, though far from Judah's land ;
Though our worn limbs are black with stripes and chains ;
Though for stern foes we till the burning sand ;
And reap, for others' joy, the summer plains ;
We bless thee, Lord, for thou art gracious still,
Even though this last black drop o'erflow our cup of ill !

We bless thee for our lost, our beauteous child ;
The tears, less bitter, she hath made us weep ;
The weary hours her graceful sports have 'guiled,
And the dull cares her voice hath sung to sleep !

She was the dove of hope to our lorn ark ;
The only star that made the strangers' sky less dark !

Our dove is fall'n into the spoiler's net ;
Rude hands defile her plumes, so chastely white ;
To the bereaved their one soft star is set,
And all above is sullen, cheerless night !
But still we thank thee for our transient bliss—
Yet, Lord, to scourge our sins remain'd no way but this?

As when our Father to Mount Moriah led
The blessing's heir, his age's hope and joy,
Pleased, as he roam'd along with dancing tread,
Chid his slow sire, the fond, officious boy,
And laugh'd in sport to see the yellow fire
Climb up the turf-built shrine, his destined funeral pyre—

Even thus our joyous child went lightly on ;
Bashfully sportive, timorously gay,

Her white foot bounded from the pavement stone
Like some light bird from off the quiv'ring spray;
And back she glanced, and smiled, in blameless glee,
'The cars, and helms, and spears, and mystic dance to sec.

By thee, oh Lord, the gracious voice was sent
That bade the Sire his murtherous task forego:
When to his home the child of Abraham went
His mother's tears had scarce begun to flow.
Alas! and lurks there, in the thicket's shade,
The victim to replace our lost, devoted maid?

Lord, even through thee to hope were now too bold;
Yet 'twere to doubt thy mercy to despair.
'Tis anguish, yet 'tis comfort, faint and cold,
To think how sad we are, how blest we were!
To speak of her is wretchedness, and yet
It were a grief more deep and bitterer to forget!

Oh Lord our God! why was she e'er our own?
Why is she not our own—our treasure still?

We could have pass'd our heavy years alone.

Alas ! is this to bow us to thy will ?

Ah, even our humblest prayers we make repine,

Nor, prostrate thus on earth, our hearts to thee resign.

Forgive, forgive—even should our full hearts break ;

The broken heart thou wilt not, Lord, despise :

Ah ! thou art still too gracious to forsake,

Though thy strong hand so heavily chastise.

Hear all our prayers, hear not our murmurs, Lord ;

And, though our lips rebel, still make thyself ador'd.

The Front of the Temple.

PRIESTS WITHIN.

Hark ! what dancing footsteps fall
Light before the Temple wall ?
Who are ye that seek to pass
Through the burnish'd gate of brass ?
Come ye with the gifts of Kings,
With the peacock's bright-cyed wings ?
With the myrrh and fragrant spice ?
With the spotless sacrifice ?
With the spoils of conquer'd lands ?
With the works of maidens' hands,
O'er the glittering loom that run,
Underneath the orient sun ?
Bring ye pearl, or choicest gem,
From a plunder'd diadem ?
Ivory wand, or ebony
From the sable Indian tree ?

Purple from the Tyrian shore ;
Amber cup, or coral store,
From the branching trees that grow
Under the salt sea-water's flow ?

PRIESTS, WITH BENINA.

With a fairer gift we come
To the God's majestic home
Than the pearls the rich shells weep
In the Erythrean deep.
All our store of ebony
Sparkles in her radiant eye.
Whiter far her spotless skin
Than the gauzy vestures thin,
Bleach'd upon the shores of Nile ;
Grows around no palmy isle
Coral like her swelling lips,
Whence the gale its sweetness sips,
That upon the spice-tree blown
Seems a fragrance all its own ;

Never yet so fair a maid
On the bridal couch was laid ;
Never form besecm'd so well
The immortal arms of Bel.

PRIESTS, LEADING HER IN.

Mid the dashing fountains cool,
In the marble vestibule,
Where the orange branches play,
Freshen'd by the silver spray,
Heaven-led virgin, take thy rest,
While we bear the silken vest
And the purple robe of pride
Meet for Bel's expected bride.

ALL THE PRIESTS.

Bridelike now she stands array'd !
Welcome, welcome, dark-hair'd maid !
Lead her in, with dancing feet,
Lead her in, with music sweet,

With the cymbals glancing round,
And the hautboy's silver sound.
See the golden gates expand,
And the Priests, on either hand,
On their faces prone they fall
Entering the refulgent Hall.
With the tread that suits thy state,
Glowing cheek, and look elate,
With thine high unbending brow,
Sacred maiden, enter thou.

FIRST PRIEST.

Chosen of Bel, thou stand'st within the Temple,
Within the first and lowest of our Halls,
Yet not least sumptuous. On the jasper pavement,
Each in his deep alcove, Chaldea's Kings
Stand on their carved pedestals. Behold them !
Their marble brows still wear the conscious awe
Of sovereignty—the mightiest of the dead,
As of the living. Eminent, in the centre,

The golden statue⁽⁵⁾ stands of Nabonassar,
That in the plain of Dura, to the sound
Of harp, and lute, and dulcimer, received
The homage of the world. The Scythian hills,
The margin of the Syrian sea, the Isles
Of Ocean, their adoring tribes cast down ;
And the high sun, at noonday, saw no face
Of all mankind turn'd upward from the dust,
Save the imperial brow of Nabonassar,
That rose in lonely loftiness, as now
You awe-crown'd image.

BENINA.

Have ye wrought him, too,
As when he prowld the plain, th' associate
Of the brute herd that browsed around, nor own'd
The dread of a superior presence, beat
By the uncourtly rains and wintry winds
Upon the undiadem'd head ?

PRIEST.

Cease, cease, nor tempt

The loving patience of the God too far !
Advance ! and wind along the aspiring stair.

PRIESTS.

Haste ! the fading light of day
Scarce will gild our lofty way.
Haste, nor tremble, tender maid !
To the sculptur'd balustrade
Cling not thus with snowy hand ;
None but slaves around thee stand,
On thy footsteps proud to wait :
Hark ! the slow-recoiling gate
Opens at our trumpets' call ;
Enter, now, our second Hall.

SECOND PRIEST.

Well mayst thou hold thine alabaster hand,
Through which the rosy light so softly shines,
Before thine eyes, oh ! maiden, as thou enterest
The Chamber of the Tribute. Here thou seest

The wealth of all the subject world, piled up
In order—from its multitude that seems
Confusion : in each deep, receding vault,
O'er all the spacious pavement, 'tis the same ;
The flaming gold, and ivory, and the gems—
If all mankind were Kings, enough to crown
Each brow with an imperial diadem !

BENINA.

Oh ! rapt Isaiah, were they not thy words—
How hath she ceased—the golden city[•] ceased !
Will all that wealth but ransom thee an hour,
Or bribe the impartial and undazzled Ruin
One instant to suspend its swooping wing ?

PRIESTS.

Breathe again the clear blue air ;
Mount again the marble stair :
Still we mount—on high—on high,
To the exulting harmony !
Hark ! the strain of triumph rings
In the Hall of Captive Kings.

THIRD PRIEST.

Now pause again : yon chained images
Are those that ruled the world, or ere the Lord
Of great Chaldea took the all-ruling sceptre
Into his iron hand, and laid the pride
Of all the kingdoms prostrate at his feet.

BENINA.

Oh ! King of Judah, thou art there ! Thy foes,
In charitable cruelty, did quench
Thy sightless eyes, lest thou should'st see the dwelling
Which thou had'st chang'd for Sion's beauteous hill ;
Lest thou should'st more than hear thy sorrowing people
Doom'd by thy sins, and by their own, to bondage.
Thou, Zedekiah, ⁽⁶⁾ did'st desert thy God,
And wert of God deserted ;—nor to thee
Is given, withdrawn into a foreign grave,
To feel again soft Canaan's fragrant gales
On thy blind brow, almost persuading thee
That, in thy darkness, thou canst still behold
Some once-lov'd spot, or dim-remember'd scene.
The glad deliverance that comes to Judah

Comes not to thee. Alas ! to sad Benina,
Oh, gracious God of Abraham, will it come ?

PRIESTS.

Maid, again we lift the song ;
Thy soft feet have rested long ;
Nearer, nearer as we climb
To the highest Hall sublime,
Bride of the Immortal, thee
All the city throngs to see,
Floating, like a snowy dove,
In the azure clouds above.
Lo ! the fourth of our abodes,
Chamber of the captive Gods !

BENINA.

Oh, Lord of Hosts ! I dare not gaze around me,
Lest in yon heaps of monstrous forms uncouth
The scaly Dagon, and the brute Osiris,
Moon-crown'd Astarte, or the Sun-like Mithra,
Some shape I should behold by the blind Gentile

Held worthy to enclose th' Illimitable
That fills the Heaven and Earth. The Cherubim,
Perchance, are here, behind whose golden wings
Thy fiery presence dwelt, but dwells no more.
I know that danger waits me on yon height,
But thither haste I rather than behold
Profaning Heathens scorn what thou hast glorified.
Lead on——

PRIESTS.

Half thy journey now is past ;
Who shall wonder at thine haste:—
Dost not wish for wings to fly
To thy blissful destiny?
Yet, oh tread with footstep light
As the falling dews of night ;
Like the gliding serpent creep
Where the gifted Dreamers sleep ;
Fold thou close thy fluttering dress,
Even thy panting breath suppress,
Lest some glorious dream we break:—
Lo ! 'tis vain—they move—they wake !

THE DREAMERS.

Hark ! hark ! the foot—we hear the trembling foot,
With motion like the dying wind upon a silver lute :
Upon our sleep it came, as soft itself as sleep ;
It shone upon our visions like a star upon the deep.

Lo ! lo ! the form, the graceful form we see
That seem'd, through all the live-long night, before our
 eyes to be :
Above, the eyes of sparkling jet, the brow like marble fair ;
And down, and o'er the snowy breast, the dark and
 wandering hair.

Hark ! hark ! the song—we hear the bridal song—
Amid the listening stars it flows the sounding heavens
 along !
It follows the Immortal down from his empyreal sky,
Descending to his mortal bride in full divinity !

BENINA.

What ! are your dreams so soft ; and saw ye nought

Of midnight flames, that clomb the palace walls,
And ran along the terrace colonnades,
And pour'd the liquid walls in torrent flames
Of dark asphaltus?—Heard ye not the wail
Of wounded men, and shrieks of flying women ;
And the carv'd Gods dash'd down in cumbrous ruin
On their own shrines ?

PRIESTS.

Great Bel avert the omen !

PRIESTS.

Hurry on, nor more delay ;
Shadows darken on our way ;
Only in the hall we tread ;
Ask of those the stars that read,
Catching every influence
Their all-ruling orbs dispense.
From those silent Prophets bright
That adorn the vault of night,
Watchers of the starry sky,
Know ye, feel ye, who is nigh ?

ASTROLOGERS.

What planet rolls its pearly car,
What orb of mild or angry hue ?
The star of love, the silver star,
Glides lonely through yon depth of blue.
We see her sailing motion calm ;
We hear the music of her sound ;
We drink Mylitta's ⁽⁷⁾ breathing balm,
In odorous clouds distill'd arround.
And calm, and musical, and sweet
Is she that star's mild influence leads—
The maid that, with her snowy feet,
Even now the sacred pavement treads.

BENINA.

Enough of this ! Oh ! chaste and quiet stars,
And pure, as all things from infecting Earth
Remov'd, and near the throne of God ; whose calm
And beautiful obedience to the laws
Of your great Maker is a mute reproach

To the unruly courses of this world,
Would they debase you to the ministers
And guilty favourers of their sinful purpose?

PRIESTS.

Now our toil is all but done ;
Now the height is all but won ;
By the High Priest's lonely seat,
By Kalassan's still retreat,
Where, in many a brazen fold,
The slumbering Dragon lies outroll'd,
Pass we on, nor pause. Nor thou
Gaze, oh Priest, with wondering brow !
Lovelier though her cheek appears
For her toil and for her tears ;
And the bosom's vest beneath
Heaves the quick and panting breath.

KALASSAN.

More beautiful ne'er trod our marble stairs !

PRIESTS.

None !—but still the maid dismiss
To her place of destined bliss :—
That no mortal eye may see—
On ! we may not follow thee :
Only with our music sweet
We pursue thy mounting feet.
Now, upon the topmost height,
Thou art lost to mortal sight !
Lo ! the couch beside thee spread,
Where the Heaven-loved maids are wed.
Till the bridal midnight deep
Bow thy head in balmy sleep—
Sleep that shall be sweetly broken
When the God his bride hath woken.

BENINA.

Alone ! alone upon this giddy height !
Yet, better thus than by that frantic rout
Encircled : yet a while, and I shall breathe

With freedom. Oh ! thou cool, delicious silence,
How grateful art thou to the cars that ring
With that wild music's turbulent dissonance !

By slow degrees the starlight face of things
Grows clear around my misty, swimming eyes.
Oh, Babylon ! how art thou spread beneath me !
Like some wide plain, with rich pavilions set
Mid the dark umbrage of a summer grove.
Like a small rivulet, that from bank to bank
Is ruffled by the sailing cygnet's breast,
Euphrates seems to wind. Oh ! thou vast city,
Thus dwindled to our human sight, what art thou
To Him that from his throne, above the skies,
Beyond the circuit of the golden Sun,
Views all the subject world !

The parting day

To twilight and the few faint early stars
Hath left the city. On yon western lake
A momentary gleam is lingering still.
Thou 'rt purpling now, oh Sun, the vines of Canaan,

And crowning, with rich light, the cedar top
Of Lebanon, where——but oh! without their daughter—
Soon my sad parents shall return. Where are ye,
Beloved? I seek in vain the lonely light
Of our dear cabin on Euphrates' side,
Amid yon kindling fires. And have ye quench'd it,
That all your dwelling be as darkly sad
As are your childless hearts?—And thou—mine own,
I thought this morn, and called thee—Adonijah,
Art thou, too, thinking of that hour like this;
The balmy, tranquil, and scarce starlight hour,
When the soft Moon had sent her harbinger,
Pale Silence, to foreshow her coming presence;
To hush the winds, and smooth the clouds before her?
That hour, that, with delicious treachery, stole
The secret from Benina's lips she long'd,
From her full heart, t' unburthen? Better, now,
Had it been buried in eternal darkness,
Than thus have kindled hopes that shone so softly—
Were quench'd so soon, so utterly.—

Fond heart,

These soft, desponding, yet delightful thoughts,
Must not dissolve thee to mistrust in him
That fill'd thee as with fire, and touch'd my lips
With holy scorn of all the wealth and pride
That blazed around my path. Even now I feel
My trembling foot more firm ; and, like the eagle's,
Mine eyes familiar with their cloudy height——
What 's here?—an hurried tread——

What art thou ? speak !

KALASSAN.

The honour'd of the God that honours thee.
Oh, miracle of beauty ! I beheld thee,
And strove with my impatient spirit within
To wait th' appointed hour ;—but, as the pilgrim
Sees the white fountain in the palmy shade,
Nor brooks delay, even thus my thirsty eyes
Demand their instant feast.

BENINA.

Thou should'st have brought
The sage Diviners to unfold the meaning
Of this dark language.

KALASSAN.

Loveliest bashfulness !

Or is it but the sportive ignorance
That laughs beneath the dark and glittering eyelids,
At the delighted dupe of its dissembling ?

BENINA.

Peace, and avaunt !

KALASSAN.

Oh maid ! that art so beauteous
That yon bright Moon is rising, all in haste,
To gaze on thee, or to display thy grace
To him, that, lost in wonder, scarce hath melted
To love.

The snowy light falls where she treads,
As 'twere a sacred place ! in her loose locks
It wanders, even as with a sense of pleasure !
And trembles on her bosom, that hath caught
Its gentle restlessness, and trembles, too,
Harmonious.

BENINA.

Must mine ears endure thee still ?

KALASSAN.

And know'st thou not why thou art here ; what bliss,
What bridal rapture waits thee ?

BENINA.

There are sins
Whose very dread infects the virgin's soul,
Tainting the fountain of her secret thoughts ;
I'm here to suffer evil—what, I know not,
But will remain in holy ignorance,
Till my dark hour of trial.

KALASSAN.

Hast thou never,
Soft maid, when fervid noon bathes all the world
In silence, in thy fond and wandering thoughts,
Beheld a noble bridegroom seated near thee,
And heard him, 'mid sweet falls of marriage-music,
Whispering what made thy pale cheek burn ?

BENINA.

Away !—

And must he see my tears ? and think me weak,
And of my God abandon'd ?

KALASSAN.

Lo! the couch

Bestrewn with flowers, whose fragrance and whose hues
Shall not have faded, till great Bel come down
Beneath that dimly canopied alcove——

BENINA.

There 's that within thy words I ought to fear :
But it should seem, that with the earth I've left
All earthly fears beneath me. I defy
Thee and thy Gods alike.

KALASSAN.

Alike in truth ;

For sometimes doth the Mightiest not disdain
To veil his glories in a mortal shape,
Even great Kalassan's. Look on me, and say
If he could choose a nobler.

BENINA.

What ! and fear'st not

Thine own false Gods—thou worse than Idol wor-
shipper ?

Why even the senseless wood and stone might wake
To indignation, and their fiery vengeance
Break forth from Heaven. Alas! and what have they,
Whose name thou dost usurp to cloke thy sin,
To do with Heaven more than thy loathsome self?

KALASSAN.

Thine eyes, albeit so full of scorn, survey not
My form in vain. I tell thee, Maid, I tread
This earth so conscïous that the best of Deity,
The power and majesty reside within me,
That I but stoop to win myself a bride
Beneath another name : here 'mid the clouds
I stand, as in mine own appropriate place.

BENINA.

The darkest pit of Tophet were too light
For thine offence.

KALASSAN.

Oh! soft and musical voice,
Art thou so lavish of injurious words?
Erewhile thou'lt be as prodigal of fondness;

So now prepare thee : ere two hours are past
Thou wedd'st Kalassan, or Kalassan's God,
Or both, or either, which thou wilt. Farewell
A little while : but I beseech thee, wear
When I return this soft becoming pride ;
Nor imitate, as yet, the amorous slaves
That weary with officious tenderness.
Be as thou seem'st, a kindred spirit with mine,
And we will mate like eagles in the Heavens,
And give our children an immortal heritage
To bathe their plumage in the fiery sun.

BENINA (*alone*).

Did the earth bear thee, monster ! or art thou
Th' Eternal Enemy in the human shape ?
Oh ! 'tis the innocent's best security,
That the unrighteous pluck the thunderbolt
With such resistless violence on their heads.
Lord of the insulted Heavens ! thou canst not strike
This impious man, without delivering me ;

Me, else unworthy of thy gracious mercy.

But lo ! what blaze of light beneath me spreads
O'er the wide city. Like yon galaxy
Above mine head, each long and spacious street
Becomes a line of silver light, the trees
In all their silent avenues break out
In flowers of fire. But chief around the Palace
Whitens the glowing splendour ; every court
That lay in misty dimness indistinct,
Is traced by pillars and high architraves
Of crystal lamps that tremble in the wind :
Each portal arch gleams like an earthly rainbow,
And o'er the front spreads one entablature
Of living gems of every hue, so bright
That the pale Moon, in virgin modesty,
Retreating from the dazzling and the tumult,
Afar upon the distant plain reposes
Her unambitious beams, or on the bosom
Of the blue river, ere it reach the walls.

Hark ! too, the sounds of revelry and song
Upon the pinions of the breeze come up
Even to this height. No eye is closed in sleep ;
None in vast Babylon but wakes to joy—
None—none is sad and desolate but I.
Yet over all, I know not whence or how,
A dim oppression loads the air, and sounds
As of vast wings do somewhere seem to brood
And hover on the winds ; and I that most
Should tremble for myself, the appointed prey
Of sin, am bow'd, as with enforced compassion,
To think on sorrows not mine own, to weep
O'er those whose laughter and whose song upbraids
My prodigality of mis-spent pity.
I will go rest, if rest it may be call'd—
Not, Adonijah—not to think of thee.
Oh ! bear a brief unwilling banishment
From thine own home, my heart ; I cannot cope
With thy subduing image, and be strong.

CHORUS OF BABYLONIANS BEFORE THE PALACE.

Awake ! awake ! put on thy garb of pride,

Array thee like a sumptuous royal bride,

O festal Babylon !

Lady, whose ivory throne

Is by the side of many azure waters !

In floating dance, like birds upon the wing,

Send tinkling forth thy silver-sandal'd daughters ;

Send in the solemn march,

Beneath each portal arch,

Thy rich-robed lords to crowd the banquet of their King.

They come ! they come from both the illumined shores ;

Down each long street the festive tumult pours ;

Along the waters dark

Shoots many a gleaming bark,

Like stars along the midnight welkin flashing,

And galleys, with their masts enwreath'd with light,

From their quick oars the kindling waters dashing ;

In one long moving line
Along the bridge they shine,
And with their glad disturbance wake the peaceful night.

Hang forth, hang forth, in all your avenues,
The arching lamps of more than rainbow hues,
Oh! gardens of delight!

With the cool airs of night
Are lightly waved your silver-foliaged trees,
The deep-cmbower'd yet glowing blaze prolong
Height above height the lofty terraces;
Seeing this new day-break,
The nestling birds awake,
The nightingale hath hush'd her sweet untimely song.

Lift up, lift up your golden-valved doors,
Spread to the glittering dance your marble floors,
Palace! whose spacious halls,
And far-receding walls,

Are hung with purple like the morning skies ;
And all the living luxuries of sound
Pour from the long out-stretching galleries ;
 Down every colonnade
 The sumptuous board is laid,
With golden cups and lamps and bossy chargers crown'd.

They haste, they haste ! the high-crown'd Rulers stand,
Each with his sceptre in his kingly hand ;

 The bearded Elders sage,
 Though pale with thought and age ;
Those through whose bounteous and unfailing hands
The tributary streams of treasure flow
From the rich bounds of earth's remotest lands ;
 All but the pomp and pride
 Of battle laid aside,

Chaldea's Captains stand in many a glittering row.

They glide, they glide ! each, like an antelope,
Bounding in beauty on a sunny slope,

With full and speaking eyes,
And graceful necks that rise
O'er snowy bosoms in their emulous pride,
The chosen of earth's choicest loveliness;
Some with the veil thrown timidly aside,
Some boastful and elate
In their majestic state
Whose bridal bed Belshazzar's self hath deign'd to bless.

Come forth ! come forth ! and crown the peerless feast,
Thou whose high birthright was the effulgent east !

On th' ivory seat alone,

Monarch of Babylon !

Survey the interminable wilderness
Of splendour, stretching far beyond the sight ;
Nought but thy presence wants there now to bless :

The music waits for thee,

Its fount of harmony,

Transcending glory thou of this thrice glorious night !

Behold ! behold ! each gem-crown'd forehead proud
And every plume and crested helm is bow'd,

Each high-arch'd vault along

Breaks out the blaze of song,

Belshazzar comes ! nor Bel, when he returns

From riding on his stormy thunder-cloud,

To where his bright celestial palace burns,

Alights with loftier tread,

More full of stately dread,

While under his fix'd feet the loaded skies are bow'd.

The Hall of Banquet.

CHORUS.

Mightiest of the sons of man !
The lion in his forest lair,
The eagle in the fields of air,
Amid the tumbling waves Leviathan,
In power without or peer or mate,
Hold their inviolable state :
Alone Belshazzar stands on earth,
Pre-eminent o'er all of human birth,
Mightiest of the sons of man !

Richest of the sons of man !
For thee the mountains teem with gold,
The spicy groves their bloom unfold,
The bird of beauty bears its feathery fan,
And amber paves the yellow seas,
And spread the branching coral trees,

Nor shrouds the mine its deepest gem,
Ambitious to adorn Belshazzar's diadem,
Richest of the sons of man !

Fairest of the sons of man !
Tall as the cedar towers thine head,
And fleet and terrible thy tread,
As the strong coursers in the battle's van ;
An Eden blooms upon thy face ;
Like music, thy majestic grace
Holds the mute gazer's breath suppress'd,
And makes a tumult in the wondering breast,
Fairest of the sons of man !

Noblest of the sons of man !
The first a kingly rule that won,
Wide as the journey of the sun,
From Nimrod thine high-sceptred race began ;
And gathering splendour still, went down
From sire to son the eternal crown,

Till full on great Belshazzar's crest
Its high meridian glory shone confest,—
Noblest of the sons of man !

Happiest of the sons of man !
In wine, in revel, and in joy
Was softly nursed the imperial boy ;
His golden years like Indian rivers ran,
And every rapturous hour surpast
The glowing rapture of the last,
Even till the plenitude of bliss
Did overflow and centre all in this,
Happiest of the sons of man !

SABARIS.

Peace ! peace ! the king vouchsafes his gracious speech.
Sit ye like statues silent ! ye have quaff'd
The liquid gladness of the blood-red wine,
And ye have eaten of the golden fruits
That the sun ripens but for kingly lips,

And now ye are about to feast your ears
With great Belshazzar's voice.

ARIOCH. ~

The crowded hall
Suspense, and prescient of the coming joy,
Is silent as the cloudless summer skies.

BELSHAZZAR.

Oh ye, assembled Babylon ! fair youths
And hoary Elders, Warriors, Counsellors,
And bright eyed Women, down my festal board
Reclining ! oh ye thousand living men,
Do ye not hold your charter'd breath from me ?
And I 'can plunge your souls in wine and joy ;
Or by a word, a look, dismiss you all
To darkness and to shame : yet, are ye not
Proud of the slavery that thus enthrals you ?
What king, what ruler over subject man
Or was, or is, or shall be like Belshazzar ?
I summon from their graves the sceptred dead
Of elder days, to see their shame. I cry

Unto the cloudy Past, unfold the thrones
That glorified the younger world : I call
To the dim Future—lift thy veil and show
The destined lords of humankind : they rise,
They bow their veil'd heads to the dust, and own
The throne whereon Chaldea's Monarch sits,
The height and pinnacle of human glory.

Oh ancient cities, o'er whose streets the grass
Is green, whose name hath wither'd from the face
Of earth ! Oh ye by rich o'erflowing Nile,
Memphis, and hundred-gated Thebes—and thou,
Assyrian Nineveh, and ye golden towers
That redden o'er the Indian streams, what are ye
To Babylon—Eternal Babylon !
That 's girt with bulwarks strong as adamant,
O'er whom Euphrates' restless waves keep watch,
That, like the high and everlasting Heavens,
Grows old, yet not less glorious ? Yes, to you
I turn, oh azure-curtain'd palaces !
Whose lamps are stars, whose music, the sweet motion

Of your own spheres, in whom the banqueters
 Are Gods, nor fear my Babylonian halls,
 Even with your splendours to compare.

Bring wine!

I see your souls are jocund as mine own :
 Pour in yon vessels of the Hebrews' God
 Belshazzar's beverage—pour it high. Hear, earth!
 Hear, Heaven ! my proud defiance !—Oh, what man,
 What God——

SABARIS, AND MANY VOICES.

The king ! the king ! look to the king !

ARIOCH.

Where? I can see nor king nor people—nothing
 But a bewildering, red, and gloom-like light
 That swallows up the fiery canopy
 Of lamps.

SABARIS.

Hath blindness smitten thee ?

ARIOCH.

I know not ;

But all things swim around me in a darkness
That dazzles——

SABARIS.

See, his shuddering joints are loosen'd,
And his knees smite each other : such a face
Is seen in tombs :—what means it ?

ARIOCH.

See'st not thou
That taunted'st me but now—upon the wall—
There—there—it moves——

BELSHAZZAR.

Oh dark and bodiless hand,
What art thou—thus upon my palace wall
Gliding in shadowy, slow, gigantic blackness?
Lo! fiery letters, where it moves, break out :
'Tis there—'tis gone :—'tis there again—no, nought
But those strange characters of flame, that burn
Upon the unkindled wall :—I cannot read them—
Can ye ?

I see your quivering lips that speak not—

Sabaris—Arioch—Captains—Elders—all
As pale and horror-stricken as myself!

Are there no wiser? Call ye forth the Dreamers,
And those that read the stars, and every priest,
And he that shall interpret best shall wear
The scarlet robe and chain of gold, and sit
Third ruler of my realm. Away!—No—leave me not
To gaze alone ;—alone, on those pale signs
Of destiny—the unextinguishable,
The indelible—Strew, strew my couch where best
I may behold what sears my burning eyeballs
To gaze on—and the cold blood round my heart
To stand, like snow. No—ache mine eyes, and quiver
My palsied limbs—I cannot turn away—
Here am I bound as by thrice linked brass,
Here, till the burthen of mine ignorance
Be from my loaded soul taken off, in silence
Deep as the midnight round a place of tombs.

The Summit of the Temple.

BENINA.

How long, O Lord ! how long must I endure
This restlessness of danger ?—I have wish'd
That even the worst were come, I am so sick
And weary with suspense : I have sate and gazed
Upon the silent moon, as she pursued
Her journey to yon blue celestial height.
Pilgrim of Heaven ! the white translucent clouds,
Through which she wanders, fall away, nor leave
A taint upon her spotless orb : Shall I,
O Lord ! emerge in purity as stainless
From the dark clouds that dim mine earthly course ?
And sometimes as a whispering sound came up,
Though but the voice of some light breathing wind
Along the stair, I felt my trembling heart,
And I grew guilty of a timorous doubt
In Him, whose guardian hand is o'er me.

Hark !

Hark ! all around—above—beneath—it bursts,
The long deep roll of——in yon cloudless skies :
It cannot be God's thunder, and the fires,
Blue as the sulphurous lightning, rise from earth,
Not Heaven. Oh madly impious ! dare ye thus
Mimic the all-destroying arms that rage
Against the guilty ? the vast temple shakes,
And all the clouded atmosphere is red
With the hell-born tempest—like to rushing chariots
Upon a stony way, like some vast forest
Ablaze with an heaven-kindled conflagration,
It comes, it comes—as in a tent of clouds,
Rent at each moment by the flashing light,
The gloom rolls back—it bursts. Speak !—who art thou,
Whose robes are woven as from the starry Heavens ?
What means that sceptre, and the wreaths, like mist,
That turban thy dusk brow ?—I know thee now.—
I see it grow into a hideous likeness—
Kalassan !

KALASSAN.

Oh most sweet humility,
That doth disdain the modest palliation
Of being a Deity's enforced bride ;
Her fond detection pierces every veil,
And springs in raptures to her mortal lover.

BENINA.

Oh can I wonder that thou dost bely
The innocent helpless virgin, when thy falsehood
Aspires with frantic blasphemy t' attain
The immaculate Heavens?

KALASSAN.

Roll on ! I say,—roll on
My bridal music ! the ear-stunning tambour—
Blaze forth my marriage fires !

BENINA.

Avaunt !—My cries——

KALASSAN.

Thy cries ! Thou might'st as well, on Taurus' brow
Call to the shipman on the Caspian Sea !
See'st thou how far thou art from earth ?

BENINA.

See'st thou

How near to Heaven ?

KALASSAN.

To Heaven ! behold, the stars

Pierce not the cool pavilion, where soft Darkness,

Our handmaid, hangs her nuptial canopy,

At times illumin'd by the flashing light

That loves to linger on thy kindling beauty.

BENINA.

'Tis as he says !—nor sound, nor gleam of succour——

Thy bride—oh, Adonijah !—ah, no bride

Of thine !—lost—lost to thee—would 'twere by death !

Is't for the sin of loving thee too fondly

I am deserted !—Spare me, Man of Terror,

And prayers for thee (they say, God loves the prayers

Of the undefiled) shall rise as constantly

As summer-dews at eve.

KALASSAN.

Now louder ! louder !

Let there be triumph in your martial sounds.

BENINA.

Oh God ! oh God ! I have condemn'd myself,
And fallen from the faith. Ah, not for me !
For thine own glory suffer not the Heathen
To boast of——Ha !—all silence, and all gloom—
I tremble—but he trembles too——

KALASSAN.

With wrath !

Slaves ! wherefore have ye quench'd mine earthly light,
And still'd my storm ?

VOICE BELOW.

Kalassan !

KALASSAN.

Slaves !

VOICE.

Kalassan !

BENINA.

Thou 'rt call'd——

VOICE.

Kalassan ! to Belshazzar's presence
We are summon'd :—Priest, Diviner, Seer, thyself ;—
If thou delay'st, stern Arioch's sword must sever
The disobedient head !

BENINA.

With tears, not words,
I bless thee, Lord !

KALASSAN.

Is this thy God ?

BENINA.

My God,
In his omnipotence, doth make the wrath
Of hurricanes and desolating fires
His ministers—why not the breath of Kings ?

KALASSAN.

The hour will come in which to tame thy scorn !

BENINA.

The hour is come that frees me from thy presence :
Haste, haste——

VOICE.

Kalassan !

KALASSAN.

Slaves ! I come.

BENINA.

Away!

Thou 'lt pardon me my fond solicitude,
Impatient of thy lingering.

KALASSAN.

Fare thee well

Till I return.

BENINA.

Till thou return'st——He's gone !

I did not think that I could hear his tread,
His angry tread, with such a deep delight.
Oh ! my fond parents ! when we meet again,
We shall not meet with strange, averted looks :
Ye will not, in sad pity, take me back
A shamed and blighted child to your cold bosoms.
And thou, betroth'd, belov'd—I shall endure

To stand before thy face, nor wish the earth
To shroud me from thine unrepublishing gaze ;
For were I all I fear'd, thou hadst ne'er reproach'd me !
And oh, sweet Siloe ! oh, my Fathers' land !
Land where the feet may wander where they will—
Land where the heart may love without a fear !
I feel that I shall tread thee ; for the Lord
Pours not his mercies in a sparing measure.
This is the earnest, of his love—the seal
With which he marks us for his own, his blest,
His ransom'd ! Oh ! fair Zion, lift thou up
Thy crown, that glitters to the morning Sun !
They come—thy lost, thy banish'd children come—
And thy streets rise to sounds of melody !

*The Hall of Banquet, with the Fiery Letters on the
Wall.*

ARIOCH.

Hath the King spoken ?

SABARIS.

Not a word : as now,
He hath sate, with eyes that strive to grow familiar
With those red characters of fire : but still
The agony of terror hath not pass'd
From his chill frame. But, if a word, a step,
A motion, from those multitudes reclined
Down each long festal board ; the bursting string
Of some shrill instrument ; or even the wind,
Whispering amid the plumes and shaking lamps,
Disturb him—by some mute, imperious gesture,
Or by his brow's stern anger, he commands
All the vast Halls to silence.

ARIOCH.

Peace ! he hears

Our murmur'd speech.

SABARIS.

No.

ARIOCH.

Did ye not observe him,
When his hand fell upon the all-ruling sceptre,
The bitter and self-mocking laugh that pass'd
O'er his pale cheek ?

SABARIS.

His lips move, but he speaks not!

All still again——

ARIOCH.

They are here :—the Priests and Seers ;
Their snowy garments sweep the Hall.

SABARIS.

Behold !

He motions them to advance and to retreat
At once—and pants, yet shudders, to demand
Their answer.

BELSHAZZAR.

Oh ! Chaldea's worshipp'd Sages—

Oh ! men of wisdom, that have pass'd your years—

Your long and quiet, solitary years,

In tracing the dim sources of th' events

That agitate this world of man—oh ! ye

That in the tongues of every clime discourse ;

Ye that hold converse with the eternal stars,

And, in their calm prophetic courses, read

The destinies of empires ; ye whose dreams

Are throng'd with the predestined images

Of things that are to be ; to whom the Fates

Unfold their secret councils ; to whose sight

The darkness of Futurity withdraws,

And one vast Present fills all Time—behold

Yon burning characters ! and read, and say

Why the dark Destinies have hung their sentence

Thus visible to the sight, but to the mind

Unsearchable ?—Ye have heard the rich reward ;

And I but wait to see whose neck shall wear

The chain of glory——

Ha ! each pale fallen lip

Voiceless ! and each upon the other turns

His wan and questioning looks.—Kalassan ! thou

Art like the rest, and gazest on thy fellows

In blank and sullen ignorance.—Spurn them forth !

Ye wise ! ye learned ! ye with Fate's mysteries

Entrusted ! Spurn, I say, and trample on them !

Let them be outcast to the scorn of slaves !

Let children pluck their beards, and every voice

Hoot at them as they pass !

Despair ! Despair !

This is thy palace now ! No throne, no couch

Beseems the King, whose doom is on his walls

Emblazed—yet whose vast empire finds not one

Whose faithful love can show its mystic import !

Low on the dust, upon the pavement-stone,

Belshazzar takes his rest !—Ye hosts of slaves,

Behold your King ! the Lord of Babylon !—

Speak not—for he that speaks, in other words

But to expound those fiery characters,
Shall ne'er speak more!

NITOCRIS (*entering*).

As thou did'st give command,
My son, I'm here to see the all-glorious feast
That shames the earth, and copes with Heaven!

Great Powers!

Is 't thus? Oh! look not with that mute reproach,
More terrible than anger, on thy mother!
Oh, pardon my rash taunts!—my son! my son!
Thou art but now the beauteous, smiling child,
That from my bosom drank the flowing life;
By whom I've pass'd so many sleepless nights
In deeper joy than slumber e'er could give!
The sole refreshment of my weary spirit
To gaze on thee!—Alas! 'twas all my crime:—
I gave to thy young lips the mantling cup
Of luxury and pride; I taught thee first
That the wide earth was made for thee, and man
Born for thy uses!

BELSHAZZAR.

Find me who will read it,
And thou wilt give me, then, a life more precious
Than that I once received of thee.

NITOCRIS.

'Twas he ;

I saw him as I pass'd along the courts,
The Hebrew, that, when visions of the night
Shook the impérial soul of Nabonassar,
Like one to whom the dimly-peopled realms
Of sleep were clear as the bright noontide Heavens,
Spake——

BELSHAZZAR.

With the speed of lightning call him hither.
No more, my mother—till he comes, no more.

ARIOCH.

King of the world, he's here.

BELSHAZZAR.

Not yet ! not yet !

Delay him ! hold him back !—My soul's not strung

To the dire knowledge.

Up the voiceless hall

He moves ; nor doth the white and ashen fear,

That paints all faces, change one line of his.

Audacious slave ! walks he erect and firm,

When kings are groveling on the earth ?—Give place !

Why do ye crowd around him ? Back ! I say.

Is your king heard—or hath he ceased to rule ?

NITOCRIS.

Alas ! my son, fear levels kings and slaves.

BELSHAZZAR.

Art thou that Daniel of the Hebrew race,

In whom the excellence of wisdom dwells

As in the Gods ? I have heard thy fame :—behold

Yon mystic letters, flaming on the wall,

That, in the darkness of their fateful import,

Baffle the wisest of Chaldea's sages !

Read, and interpret ; and the satrap robe

Of scarlet shall invest thy limbs ; the chain

Of gold adorn thy neck ; and all the world

Own thee third ruler of Chaldea's realm !

DANIEL.

Belshazzar, be thy gifts unto thyself,
And thy rewards to others. I, the servant
Of God, will read God's writing to the King.
The Lord of Hosts to thy great Ancestor,
To Nabonassar, gave the all-ruling sceptre
O'er all the nations, kingdoms, languages ;
Lord paramount of life and death, he slew
Where'er he will'd ; and where he will'd men lived ;
His word exalted, and his word debased ;
And so his heart swell'd up ; and, in its pride,
Arose to Heaven ! But then the Lord of earth
Became an outcast from the sons of men—
Companion of the browsing beasts ! the dews
Of night fell cold upon his crownless brow,
And the wild asses of the desert fed
Round their unenvied peer ! And so he knew
That God is Sovereign o'er earth's sceptred Lords.
But thou, his son, unwarn'd, untaught, untamed,

Belshazzar, hast arisen against the Lord,
And in the vessels of his house hast quaff'd
Profane libations, 'mid thy slaves and women,
To gods of gold, and stone, and wood ; and laugh'd
The King of Kings, the God of Gods, to scorn.
Now hear the words, and hear their secret meaning—
“ Number'd ! ” twice “ Number'd ! Weigh'd ! Divided ! ”

King,

Thy reign is number'd, and thyself art weigh'd,
And wanting in the balance, and thy realm
Sever'd, and to the conquering Persian given !

ARIOCH.

What vengeance will he wreak ? The pit of lions—
The stake——

BELSHAZZAR.

Go—lead the Hebrew forth, array'd
In the proud robe, let all the city hail
The honour'd of Belshazzar. Oh ! not long
Will that imperial name command your awe !
And, oh ! ye bright and festal halls, whose vaults

Were full of sweet sounds as the summer groves,
Must ye be changed for chambers, where no tone
Of music sounds, nor melody of harp,
Or lute, or woman's melting voice?—My mother!—
And how shall we two meet the coming ruin?
In arms! thou say'st; but with what arms, to front
The Invisible, that in the silent air
Wars on us? Shall we seek some place of silence,
Where the cold cypress shades our Fathers' tombs,
And grow familiar 'with the abode of Death?

And yet how calm, how fragrant, how serene
The night!—When empires fall, and Fate thrusts down
The monarchs from their ancient thrones, 'tis said,
The red stars meet, with ominous, hostile fires;
And the dark vault of Heaven flames all across
With meteors; and the conscious earth is rock'd;
And foaming rivers burst their shores! But now,
Save in my soul, there is no prescient dread:—
Nought but my fear-struck brow is dark and sad.
All sleeps in moonlight silence: ye can wave,

Oh happy gardens ! in the cool night airs
Your playful branches; ye can rise to Heaven,
And glitter, my unconscious palace-towers ;
No gliding hand, no Prophet's voice, to you
Hath rent the veil that hides the awful future !
Well, we'll go rest once more on kingly couches,
My mother, and we'll wake and feel that earth
Still trembles at our nod, and see the slaves
Reading their fate in our imperial looks ! •
And then—and then——Ye Gods ! that I had still
Nought but my shuddering and distracting fears ;
That those dread letters might resume once more
Their dark and unintelligible brightness ;
Or that 'twere o'er, and I and Babylon
Were—what a few short days or hours will make us !

Above the City.

THE DESTROYING ANGEL.

The hour is come ! the hour is come ! With voice
Heard in thy inmost soul, I summon thee,
Cyrus, the Lord's anointed ! And thou River,
That flow'st exulting in thy proud approach
To Babylon, beneath whose shadowy walls
And brazen gates, and gilded palaces,
And groves, that gleam with marble obelisks,
Thy azure bosom shall repose, with lights
Fretted and chequer'd like the starry heavens :
I do arrest thee in thy stately course,
By Him that pour'd thee from thine ancient fountain,
And sent thee forth, even at the birth of Time,
One of his holy streams, to lave the mounts
Of Paradise. Thou hear'st me : thou dost check
Abrupt thy waters, as the Arab chief

His headlong squadrons. Where the unobserved
Yet toiling Persian breaks the ruining mound,
I see thee gather thy tumultuous strength ;
And, through the deep and roaring Naharmalcha, ⁽⁸⁾
Roll on, as proudly conscious of fulfilling
The Omnipotent command ! While, far away,
The lake, that slept but now so calm, nor moved
Save by the rippling moonshine, heaves on high
Its foaming surface, like a whirlpool gulf,
And boils and whitens with the unwonted tide.

But silent as thy billows used to flow,
And terrible the hosts of Elam move,
Winding their darksome way profound, where man
Ne'er trod, nor light e'er shone, nor air from Heav'n
Breathed. Oh ! ye secret and unfathom'd depths,
How are ye now a smooth and royal way
For th' army of God's vengeance ! Fellow slaves,
And ministers of the Eternal purpose,
Not guided by the treacherous injured sons
Of Babylon, but by my mightier arm,

Ye come, and spread your banners, and display
Your glittering arms as ye advance, all white
Beneath th' admiring moon. Come on ! the gates
Are open—not for banqueters in blood
Like you !—I see on either side o'erflow
The living deluge of arm'd men, and cry
Begin, begin, with fire and sword begin
The work of wrath. Upon my shadowy wings
I pause and float a little while to see
Mine human instruments fulfil my task
Of final ruin. Then I mount, I fly,
And sing my proud song, as I ride the clouds,
That stars may hear, and all the hosts of worlds,
That live along the interminable space,
Take up Jehovah's everlasting triumph !

The Streets of Babylon.

ADONIJAH, IMLAH.

ADONIJAH.

Imlah ! this way he motion'd me to pass.

IMLAH.

My son ! (alas ! I ever call thee son,
Though my old childless heart but bleeds the more
At that fond name), the broad Euphrates lies
That way, nor boat nor bark is wont to moor
By that inhospitable pier ; he meant
Toward the Temple—that way leads not thither.

ADONIJAH.

Father, the Lord will make a way, where'er
His Prophets do direct our feet. Thou saw'st not
As I ; they led him at the king's command
Along the streets, in scarlet clad, and made

Their trumpets clamour, and their voices shout
Before great Daniel ; but it seem'd he mark'd
Nor trumpet sound, nor voice of man : the garb,
Th' array, the triumph touch'd not him : he held
A strange, elate, and voiceless intercourse
With some dark being in the clouds ; for now
I saw him, as the torches shone upon him—
His brow like some crown'd warrior's, when his hosts
Are spreading, in their arm'd magnificence,
Over a conquer'd realm ; and now he seem'd
To count impatient the slow time ; and now
He look'd, where in the distant darkness rose
The Temple, now where still the palace shone
With its rich festal light, as though he watch'd
And listen'd for some earthquake to o'erthrow them.
His ominous looks were terrible with ruin ;
The majesty of God's triumphant vengeance
Was in his tread : even thus the Patriarch look'd,
When, mounting in his ark, he saw the deluge
Come sweeping o'er the doom'd yet heedless world.

Something, be sure, the hand of God prepares
To rescue, to revenge.

IMLAH.

Too late ! too late !

Oh that last night !

ADONIJAH.

My father !

IMLAH.

Thou art right ;

'Twas rashly, madly spoken—but my spirit
Is wrung almost to find a deadly pleasure
In madly uttering what the heart abhors.
I'll on with thee.

ADONIJAH.

He motion'd me alone.

IMLAH.

He did—and he must be obey'd : farewell,
Dear youth—dear son ! if thou should'st meet with her
Cast forth in scorn, and groveling on the earth,
Chide her not, Adonijah—speak not to her,

Lest thy compassion seem to mock her shame :
But, pray thee, lead her to the old man's home—
To the old man's heart, that will not love her less,
Though his love have less of pride and more of sorrow.
Farewell, and prosper !

I'll go wander on
Through the dusk streets. Poor Naomi ! I left thee,
Thy wretchedness had wrought its own relief,
Asleep. Oh^t thou, if thou should'st never wake,
Thrice bless'd. Beloved, I should mourn for thee,
But envy while I mourn'd.

Great King of vengeance,
God of my fathers ! thou art here at length.
Behold ! behold ! from every street the flames
Burst out, and armed men, proud conquering men,
Move in the blaze they've kindled to destroy.
Are ye the avenging Spirits of the Lord,
Descended on the blast, and clouding o'er
The Heavens, as ye come down, with that red cope
Deeper than lightning ? No—it is the Mede,

The ravaging, the slaughtering, merciless Mede.
This way they fly, with shrieks, and clashing arms,
And multitudes that choke th' impassable streets,
Till the fierce conqueror hew his ruthless way.
Shall not I fly ? and wherefore ? Oh ! waste on,
And burn, triumphant stranger ! trample down
Master and slave alike !——there is one house
Thou canst not make more desolate : thou canst not
Pour ills on any of these guilty roofs,
So hateful as have burst on mine.——Who comes ?

NITOCRIS, IMLAH.

NITOCRIS.

My son ! my son ! I heard the cries—I saw
The flames ; I rush'd through all the shrieking palace
To seek him—and I found him not ; and sprang
To find him, where I thought not, where I knew not.
One moment do I plunge into the gloom
Of some dark court, to shun the foe—the next,

I bless the angry and destroying light,
Because I think it may disclose the face,
The beauteous face of mine Imperial Boy.
I've pass'd by widows, and by frantic mothers,
That howl and tear their hair o'er their dead children :
I cannot find my child, even to perform
That last sad duty of my love—to mourn him.
I've cried aloud, and told them I'm their queen ;
They gaze on me, and mock me with their pity,
Showing that queens can be as desolate
As slaves : and sometimes have I paused and stoop'd
O'er dying faces, with a hideous hope
Of seeing my son ! I dare not cry Belshazzar,
Lest he should hear me, and come forth and meet
The slaughtering sword. Ye Gods ! his very beauty
And majesty will mark him out for slaughter :
And the fierce Persian, that in weary pride
May scorn to flesh his sword on meaner heads,
Will win himself an everlasting glory,
By slaying th' unarm'd, the succourless Belshazzar.

Here 's one—hast seen him? Slave, I 'll give thee gold,
I 'll give thee kingdoms——ah! what gold or kingdoms
Hath the sad queen of captive Babylon
To give? but thou hast haply known the love
That parents bear to those who have been a part
Of their own selves; whose lives are twined with theirs
So subtly; that 'twere worse than death to part them.
Hast seen the king—my son—the pride of kings—
My peerless son?

IMLAH.

I had a child this morn,
Beautiful as the doe upon the mountains,
Pure as the crystal of the brook she drinks;
And when they rent her from her father's heart,
To death——oh no!—to deeper woe than death,
The queen of Babylon swept proudly by,
Nor stoop'd to waste her pity on the childless.

NITOCRIS.

Oh ye just Gods! but cruel in your justice!
And never met ye more?

IMLAH.

No more !

NITOCRIS.

Great Heaven !

I own your equal hand : the bitter chalice
That we have given to others' lips, our own
Must to the dregs drink out. So, never more
Shall I behold thee—not to wind thy corpse—
To pour sweet ointments on thy clay cold limbs.
Alas ! and what did Nabonassar's daughter
In the dark streets alone ? when there were men
To rally, arms to array—my voice, my look,
The hereditary terror that is said
To dwell on mine imperial brow, had pour'd
Dismay and flight upon the conquering Mede.
Semiramis, for empire, cast away
The woman, and went forth in brazen arms.
I could not for my son !

My naked feet

Bleed where I move ; and on my crownless head

(For what have I to do with crowns ?) beat cold
The chilling elements ; till but now I felt not
My loose, and thin, and insufficient raiment.
Well, there 's enough to shroud the dead ; and thee
To colder nakedness, my son ! my son !
The spoiler will have stripp'd——

IMLAH.

God pardon me
For taunting her distress ! Rest here, oh queen !
Under this low and wretched roof thou art safe ;
The plunderer wars upon the gilded palace,
Not the base hovel. There 's a mother there
As sad as thou, and sleep may be as merciful
To thee as her.

NITOCRIS.

Sleep ! sleep ! with Babylon
In flames around me ; Nabonassar's realm,
The city of earth's sovereigns rushing down,
The pride of countless ages, and the glory,
By generations of triumphant kings

Rear'd up—my sire's, my husband's, and my son's,
And mine own stately birth-place perishing :
The summer gardens of my joy cut down ;
The ivory chambers of my luxury,
Where I was wed, and bore my beauteous son,
Howl'd through by strangers ! No—I'll on, and find
Death or my son, or both ! My glorious city !
My old ancestral throne ! thou 'lt still afford
A burial fire. I've lived a queen, the daughter
Of kings, the wife, the mother—and will die
Queen-like, with Babylon for my funeral pile !

Before the Temple.

BENINA.

Oh thou dread night ! what new and awful signs
Crowd thy portentous hours, so calm in heav'n,
With all thy stars and full-orb'd moon serene
Sleeping on crystal and pellucid clouds !
How terrible on earth ! as I rush'd down
The vacant stair, nor heard a living sound,
Save mine own bounding footstep, all at once
Methought Euphrates' rolling waters sank
Into the earth ; the gilded galleys rock'd,
And plunged and settled in the sandy depths ;
And the tall bridge upon its lengthening pier
Seem'd to bestride a dark, unfathom'd gulf.
Then, where blue waters and the ivory decks
Of royal vessels, and their silver prows,
Reflected the bright lights of heav'n, they shone
Upon the glancing armour, helms, and spears

Of a vast army : then the stone-paved walls
Rang with the weight of chariots, and the gates
Of brass fell down with ponderous clang : then sank
O'er the vast city one sepulchral silence,
As though the wondering conqueror scarce believed
His easy triumph. But ye revellers
That lay at rest upon your festal garments,
The pleasant weariness of wine and joy,
And the sweet dreams of your scarce-ended pleasures,
Still hanging o'er your silken couches ! ye
Woke only, if ye woke indeed, to see
The Median scimitar that, red with blood,
Flash'd o'er you, or the blaze of fire that wrapt
In sulphurous folds the chambers of your rest.
Oh Lord of Hosts ! in thine avenging hour
How dreadful art thou ! Pardon if I weep
When all my grateful heart should beat with joy
For my deliverance.

KALASSAN, BENINA.

KALASSAN.

All is lost ! Great Bel,
Thus, thus dost thou avenge thy broken rite !
Now, by thy thunders, 'tis the beauteous bride—
Thou givest her to me yet.

BENINA.

Miscreant ! what mean'st thou ?

KALASSAN. /

'Twas love before ; and now 'tis love and vengeance ;
And I will quaff the doubly-mantling cup,
In all its richness.

BENINA.

Guilty man ! look round,
Thou seest my God, the God of Gods, reveal'd
In yon wide fires ! Nor thou, nor one of those
That walk the death-doom'd streets of Babylon,
Have even an hour to live.

KALASSAN.

Then I've no hour
To waste. 'Tis said the Indian widows mount

In pride and joy their husbands' funeral pyres ;
Thou, in thy deep devotion, shalt excel them,
And wed thy bridegroom for the loftier glory
Of dying by his side.

BENINA.

Oh mercy !

KALASSAN.

Mercy !

Ask of the Babylonian maids and wives,
If they find mercy ?

BENINA.

Ah ! and I presumed
To speak of pitying others !

KALASSAN.

Come——What 's here ?

KALASSAN, BENINA, ADONIJAH.

ADONIJAH.

With unwet foot I trod the river depths :
It is the privilege of Israel's sons

To walk through seas as on dry land.

BENINA.

Oh stranger !

That bear'st a Persian scimitar——No stranger !

Is it his angel, with his beauteous brow ?

His eyes, his voice——his clasping arms around me !——

Mine own, my brave, my noble Adonijah !

Too bounteous Heaven !

KALASSAN.

Fond slave ! unclasp thine arms.

ADONIJAH.

What——must I rob the Persian of his victim ?

Oh ! not in vain this bright and welcome steel

Glitter'd to court my grasp ! What ! the first foe

My warrior arm hath met retreat before me ?

I 'll follow thee to earth's remotest verge.

BENINA.

Oh ! I could shriek, and weary Heaven with cries

For my sad self——for thee——for thee ! My lips

Are parch'd to silence ; and my throat——Come back !

Their swords clash—some one falls—and groans :—he
calls not

Upon the God of Israel.—Ha ! perchance
He cannot cry ! All 's dark,—Ah me ! how strong,
How dreadful was the Heathen in his strength !
He 's here !—I dare not ask, which art thou ? which—
Alas, prophetic spirit hast thou left me
To ask ? Oh Love ! thou used to know his tread
'Mong thousands !

ADONIJAH.

Sweet ! where art thou ?

BENINA.

On thy bosom.

ADONIJAH.

The Lord hath triumph'd by his servant's hands :
He lies in death, blaspheming his own Gods.

BENINA.

Merciful ! I almost thank thee for the dread
And danger of this night, that closes thus
In such o'erpowering joy !

ADONIJAH.

Hast suffer'd nought
But dread and danger ?

BENINA.

What ?

ADONIJAH.

Thou 'st been where evil
Riots uncheck'd, untamed !

BENINA.

Oh Adonijah !

I have endured thy lip upon my cheek,
And I endure thine arms clasp'd fondly round me.
And on thy bosom I recline, and look
Upon thy face with eyes suffused with tears,
But not of shame. What would'st thou more ?

ADONIJAH.

Nought, nought.

Oh pardon that my jealous fears misdoubted
Thy pure, thy proud, thy holy love ! Come on !
Come to thy parents' home that wait for thee,

And change the voiceless house of desolation
To an abode of joy, as mute.

Come ! come !

Beauteous as her that with her timbrel pass'd
Along the Red Sea depths, and cast her song
Upon the free airs of the wilderness—
The song of joy, of triumph, of deliverance !

The Streets of Babylon in Flames.

BELSHAZZAR.

I cannot fight nor fly: where'er I move,
On shadowy battlement, or cloud of smoke,
That dark unbodied hand waves to and fro,
And marshals me the way to death—to death
That still eludes me. Every blazing wall
Breaks out in those red characters of fate;
And when I raised my sword to war, methought
That dark-stoled Prophet stood between, and seem'd
Rebuking Heaven for its slow consummation
Of his dire words.

I am alone: my slaves
Fled at the first wild outcry; and my women
Closed all their doors against me—for they knew me
Mark'd with the seal of destiny: no hand,
Though I have sued for water, holds a cup
To my parch'd lips; no voice, as I pass on,

Hath bless'd me ; from the very festal garments,
That glitter'd in my halls, they shake the dust :
Ev'n the priests spurn'd me, as abhorr'd of Heaven.
Oh ! but the fiery Mede doth well avenge me !
They 're strew'd beneath my feet—though not in wor-
ship !

Oh death ! death ! death ! that art so swift to seize
The conqueror on his triumph day, the bride
Ere yet her wedding lamps have waned, the king
While all mankind are kneeling at his footstool—
Thou 'rt only slow to him that knows himself
Thy fated prey, that seeks within the tomb
A dark retreat from wretchedness and shame.
From shame !—the heir of Nabonassar's glory !
From wretchedness !—the Lord of Babylon—
Of golden and luxurious Babylon !
Alas ! through burning Babylon ! the fallen,
The city of lamentation and of slaughter !
A fugitive and outcast, that can find,
Of all his realm, not even a grave !—so base,
That even the conquering Mede disdains to slay him !

*Before the House of Imlah.**IMLAH, ADONIJAH, BENINA, NAOMI.*

IMLAH.

Naomi! Naomi! look forth!—she's here!

NAOMI.

I know she is—in dreams: through all the night
 I've seen her, gliding from the fountain side
 With the pure urn of water, or with lips
 Apart, and bashful voice, that faintly breath'd
 One of her country's songs! I've seen her kneeling
 In prayer, alas! that ne'er was heard on high!
 And thou hast scared my vision's joys away—
 To see—all heav'n on fire, and the vast city—
 Imlah! what mean those massy clouds of smoke,
 Those shrieks and clashings?—and—that youth and
 maid,

Why stand they there? we need no sad remembrancers

Of our deep desolation !

BENINA.

Doth my mother.

With such cold salutation welcome home

Her child ?

NAOMI.

No ! no ! ye can no more delude me !

Twice have I woken, and heard that voice, and stretch'd

My arms——

BENINA.

But hast not folded to thy bosom,

As thus, thy child, thy lost, thy loved Benina !

NAOMI.

'Tis living flesh ! it is a breathing lip !

And the heart swells like——Oh no !—not like mine !

Oh ! thou twice born ! the sorrow and the joy

That I endured to bring my beauteous babe

Into the world were nought to this !.

BENINA.

Dear mother,

May I ne'er cost thee bitterer tears than these——

IMLAH.

My father's God, thou show'dst thyself of old,
By smiting water from the stony rock,
And raining manna on the desert sands!
Here is thy best—most gracious miracle!
Making the childless heart to laugh with gladness;
The eyes that had forgot to weep o'erflow
With tears delicious! Thou hast rais'd the dead,
And to the widow given her shrouded child!
But what was that pale boy to her that stands
So beautiful before us? What was death
To her dark trial? And she's here—and life
Bounds in her bosom—the young doves that erst,
Ere yet the cold airs soil'd their snowy plumes,
Were offer'd in thy Temple not so pure!

NAOMI.

How cam'st thou hither?

BENINA.

Ask of him that led me—

Of him—that all but I seem to have forgotten.

ADONIJAH.

Love, I shall take a sweet revenge hereafter,
Resuming to myself the boon that now
They have no time to thank me for.—What 's he,
That rushes where proud War disdains to spoil?
That tread was wont to move in marble halls,
To sounds of music. Round his limbs, that shake
And quiver, as ^{with} pain, he wraps his robes,
Like one men wont' to gaze on. Even despair
On such a brow looks noble!—Hark! he speaks—

The above, BELSHAZZAR.

BELSHAZZAR.

'Tis come at last! the barbed arrow drinks
My life-blood. Mid the base abode of slaves
I seem to stand: not here—my fathers set
Like suns in glory! I'll not perish here,
And stifle like some vile, forgotten lamp!

Oh, dreadful God ! is 't not enough ?—My state
 I equall'd with the Heavens—and wilt thou trample me
 Beneath these——What are ye that crowd around me ?
 I have a dim remembrance of your forms
 And voices. Are ye not the slaves that stood
 This morn before me ? and——

IMLAH.

Thou spurn'dst us from thee.

BELSHAZZAR.

And ye 'll revenge you on the clay-cold corpse.

IMLAH.

Fear not : our God, and this world's cruel usage,
 Hath taught us early what kings learn too late.

BELSHAZZAR.

Ye know me, then—ye know the King of Babylon—
 The King of dust and ashes ? for what else
 Is now the beauteous city—earth's delight ?
 And what the King himself but—dust and ashes ?

BENINA.

He faints—support him, dearest Adonijah !

BELSHAZZAR.

Mine eyes are heavy, and a swoon, a sleep
 Swims o'er my head :—go, summon me the lutes,
 That us'd to soothe me to my balmiest slumbers ;
 And bid the snowy-handed maidens fan
 The dull, hot air around me. 'Tis not well—
 This bed—'tis hard and damp. I gave command
 I would not lie but on the softest plumes
 That the birds bear. Slaves ! hear ye not ?—'tis cold—
 'Tis piercing cold !

BENINA.

Alas ! he 's little used
 To feel the night winds on his naked brow :
 He 's breathing still—spread o'er him that bright mantle ;
 A strange, sad use for robes of sovereignty.

The above, NITOCRIS.

NITOCRIS.

Why should I pass street after street, through flames

That make the hardy conqueror shrink ; and stride
O'er heaps of dying, that look up and wonder
To see a living and unwounded being ?
Oh ! mercifully cruel, they do slay
The child and mother with one blow ! the bride
And bridegroom ! I alone am spar'd, to die
Remote from all—from him with whom I 've cherish'd
A desperate hope to mingle my cold ashes !
'Tis all the daughter of great Nabonassar
Hath now to ask !—I 'll sit me down and listen,
And through that turbulent din of clattering steel,
And cries of murder'd men, and smouldering houses,
And th' answering trumpets of the Mede and Persian,
Summoning their bands to some new work of slaughter,
Anon one universal cry of triumph
Will burst ; and all the city, either host,
In mute and breathless admiration, lie
To hear the o'erpowering clamour that announces
Belshazzar slain !—and then I 'll rise and rush
To that dread place—they'll let me weep or die

Upon his corpse!—Old man, thou 'st found thy child.

IMLAH.

I have—I have—and thine. Oh! rise not thus,
In thy majestic joy, as though to mount
Earth's throne again. Behold the King!

NITOCRIS.

My son!

On the cold earth—not there, but on my bosom—
Alas! that's colder still. My beauteous boy,
Look up and see—

BELSHAZZAR.

I can see nought—all 's darkness!

NITOCRIS.

Too true: he 'll die, and will not know me! Son!
Thy mother speaks—thy only kindred flesh,
That lov'd thee ere thou wert; and, when thou 'rt gone,
Will love thee still the more!

BELSHAZZAR.

Have dying kings

Lovers or kindred? Hence! disturb me not.

NITOCRIS.

Shall I disturb thee, crouching by thy side
 To die with thee? Oh! how he used to turn
 And nestle his young cheek in this full bosom,
 That now he shrinks from! No! it is the last
 Convulsive shudder of cold death. My son,
 Wait—wait, and I will die with thee—not yet—
 Alas! yet this was what I pray'd for—this—
 To kiss thy cold cheek, and inhale thy last—
 Thy dying breath.

IMLAH.

Behold! behold, they rise;
 Feebly they stand, by their united strength
 Supported. Hath yon kindling of the darkness,
 Yon blaze, that seems as if the earth and heaven
 Were mingled in one ghastly funeral pile,
 Arous'd them? Lo, the flames, like a gorg'd serpent,
 That slept in glittering but scarce-moving folds,
 Now, having sprung a nobler prey, break out
 In tenfold rage.

ADONIJAH.

How like a lioness,

Robb'd of her kingly brood, she glares! She wipes
 From her wan brow the gray discolour'd locks,
 Where used to gleam Assyria's diadem;
 And now and then her tenderest glance recurs
 To him that closer to her bleeding heart
 She clasps, as self-reproachful that aught earthly
 Distracts her from her one maternal care.

IMLAH.

More pale, and more intent, he looks abroad
 Into the ruin, as though he felt a pride
 Even in the splendour of the desolation!

BELSHAZZAR.

The hand—the unbodied hand—it moves—look there!
 Look where it points!—my beautiful palace——

NITOCRIS.

Look—

The Temple of great Bel——

BELSHAZZAR.

Our halls of joy!

NITOCRIS.

Earth's pride and wonder !

IMLAH.

Ay, o'er both the fire
Mounts like a conqueror ; here, o'er spacious courts,
And avenues of pillars, and long roofs,
From which red streams of molten gold pour down,
It spreads, till all, like those vast fabrics, seem
Built of the rich clouds round the setting sun—
All the wide heavens, one bright and shadowy palace !
But terrible here—th' Almighty's wrathful hand
Every where manifest !—There the Temple stands,
Tower above tower, one pyramid of flame;
To which those kingly sepulchres by Nile
Were but as hillocks to vast Caucasus !
Aloof, the wreck of Nimrod's impious tower
Alone is dark; and something like a cloud,
But gloomier, hovers o'er it. All is mute :
Man's cries, and clashing steel, and braying trumpet—
The only sound the rushing noise of fire !

Now, hark ! the universal crash—at once
They fall—they sink——

ADONIJAH.

And so do those that rul'd them !
The Palace, and the Temple, and the race
Of Nabonassar, are at once extinct !
Babylon and her kings are fallen for ever !

IMLAH.

Without a cry, without a groan, behold them,
Th' Imperial mother and earth-ruling son
Stretch'd out in death ! Nor she without a gleam
Of joy expiring with her cheek on his :
Nor he unconscious that with him the pride
And terror of the world is fallen—th' abode
And throne of universal empire—now
A plain of ashes round the tombless dead !—
Oh, God of hosts ! Almighty, Everlasting !
God of our Fathers, thou alone art great !

NOTES.

Note 1, page 17, line 1.

Of Nabonassar's sway.

"Nebuchadnezzar—Nabonassar—Ce nom est confondu par les Orientaux avec celui de Nabocadnassar, quoique les Grecs et les Latins les distinguent."—*D'Herbelot, Bibliothèque Orientale.*

Note 2, page 22, line 14.

Save with the immaculate blood of yearling lambs.

From Diodorus.

Note 3, page 22, line 17.

The God repotes, must the chosen Virgin.

See Herodotus, Clio.

Note 4, page 25, line 14.

Down to the red and pearly main.

The Erythrean Sea, the Gulf of Persia, celebrated for the pearls of Ormuz.

Note 5, page 73, line 1.

The golden statue stands of Nabonassar.

It does not appear certain what this statue was, which Nebuchadnezzar erected on the plain of Dura. I have taken the poetic licence of supposing it to be his own.

Note 6, page 76, line 12.

Thou, Zedekiah, didst desert thy God.

Zedekiah, carried away at the last and final desolation of Jerusalem.

Note 7, page 81, line 7.

We drink Mylitta's breathing balm.

The Assyrian Venus.—Herod.

Note 8, page 127, line 4.

And through the deep and roaring Naharmalcha.

The royal canal which connected the waters of the Euphrates with the artificial lake.

THE END.

